

Narrogin's Post World War II European Immigrants

An Essay by Gary Norwell

The ten years after the end of World War II was one of the most significant periods in the history and development of Narrogin. Many of the Australian men who had fought overseas had just returned home to start what is now known as the "Baby Boom". In the late nineteen forties and early nineteen fifties hundreds of European Immigrants came to Narrogin mainly from Displaced Persons camps in Germany and Italy. Their countries of origin included Poland, Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Italy, Belarus, Russia and Germany.

Very few of the new arrivals could speak much English when they arrived in Australia. To his credit a local Doctor, Michael Slavin, who spoke a number of their native languages took on an advocacy role on their behalf. His command of some of their languages also made it easier for them to explain the symptoms of their illness when they became sick.

In about 2009, Bob Sedlarczuk and I set out to record some of the names of the European Immigrant Families who came to Narrogin in an Excel spreadsheet. Bob's parents were among the first Immigrants to move into the WA Government Railway tent camp. A great deal of input was provided by Bob's Mother Helen (Lena). Bob and I were both working for Main Roads at the Don Aitken Centre in East Perth at the time.

I was born in Narrogin in 1947 and attended Narrogin Primary School for 7 years and Narrogin Agricultural Senior High School for 5 years. Bob was also born in Narrogin in 1952. We were both born at the old Vaillima Maternity Hospital on the corner of Falcon Street and Earl Street. Bob's Father was originally from Ukraine and his mother was from Russia. They were married in Germany in 1946 and came to Narrogin in December 1950. Their first home was in a tent camp on railway land at the south end of town. When Bob spoke to his Mother about our "little project", and walked the old campsite with her, she provided him with a long list of names of other immigrant families and their countries of origin and day to day living in the camp. This information was incorporated into the original Excel spreadsheet that has since grown quite steadily.

Additional names were added to the spreadsheet with a lot of information extracted from Maurie White's publication "Memorial II: Narrogin and World War II". The text of Maurie's work is attached at Appendix 1 and includes 102 Family names of the European Immigrants who came to Narrogin. Maurie was a former Narrogin High School Teacher who was my First Year French Teacher in 1960. Maurie did a lot of historical research as Narrogin's Honorary Historian for which he was awarded Narrogin's Citizen of the Year in 1992.

Another source of information was the Narrogin Cemetery records, where the names of the deceased person, their spouse and children are also recorded. This was supplemented by photographs of grave headstones taken by Bob Sedlarczuk. All of the information from various sources has been incorporated into the spreadsheet which will now be referred to as **the database**. The net result has been that by October 2016 the total number of Families and Single Individuals in the database had grown to around 300.

During 2015, Bob arranged for our database to be placed on the Lost Narrogin (LN) Facebook site, with an invitation for people to provide more information, such as additional names and spelling corrections. There continues to be a steady stream of additions and amendments received through the Lost Narrogin Facebook site. Bob has also arranged for numerous photos to be placed on the Lost Narrogin site and provided a Hyperlink to connect the photos to the Family names in the database.

Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy of the spelling of Christian names and Surnames. It is felt that the First names should be those from the countries of origin and not an anglicised version of that name; eg Bogdan should be recorded as Bogdan and not Bob. Where applicable the Anglicised name has been included in brackets following the given name eg Bogdan (Bob). Names of deceased children have also been included to ensure a complete record is made.

When the Immigrants were brought to Australia they came knowing that the free passage for them and their Families was on the basis that they would be required to work for two years for any organisation that they were assigned to such as WA Government Railways and Main Roads. At the end of their 2 year term they were free to leave and do whatever they wished to do.

Some left at the end of their 2 year term while the majority elected to remain with the organisation they had been assigned to. In the case of the WA Government Railways, the following employees went on to complete more than 20 Years of dedicated service in contributing to the rehabilitation and maintenance of a high quality rail network in the Region.

Adam Alexandrow, Bob Chmielewski, Guvedo Conadolli, Mick Galus, Wasyl Gornik, Len Hovich, Wasyl Hrynczuk, Stan Jendrzeczak, Ted Jewstreski, George Juba, Wasyl Kaczmarczyk, Henry Kotara, Marion Kozicki, Stan Lisowski, Sergyi Makedonez, Andy Madej, Jan Miskiewicz, Albert Nardini, Tony Palumbo, Alek Partyka, Mick Parafianowicz, Tony Pinto, Ivan Potapenya, Wacław Rosiejak, Jan Samulkiewicz, Jan Smal, Antoni Smigiel, Władysław Szafranski, Ivan Valenta, Ljubisa Virtovic, Jan Wnuk, Wazcalaw Wrona, Stefan Zajda, Michail Zapara and Jan Zielke.

Photo of Rail Motor with names of people in photo.

In the case of Main Roads, the following Immigrants completed more than 20 years of dedicated service in developing and maintaining a high quality road network in the Region;

John Bialedda, Mick Bloch, Tony Buemi, Greg Bulich, Florian Druck, Joe Fic, Frank Galea, Keith Kosmider, Saveria Lanciano, Wladislaw Mrowczynski, Peter Olywa, Harry Ostrowski, Olef Saare, Boris Schukowsky, Jan Staporek, Wasyl Sylwestruk and Karl Tonts.

Photo of a Nissen hut

Some people like Marion Kozicki who commenced working for Main Roads, and was later transferred to WAGR would have completed a combined total of more than 20 years with both Main Roads and WAGR.

Conversely Tony Buemi started working for WAGR and later transferred to Main Roads where he became a very competent Senior Foreman. He also worked in Main Roads Pilbara Division in the nineteen seventies and played an important role in sealing North West Coastal Highway between Karratha and Port Hedland.

In his writings, Maurie White recorded the fact that there were three separate camps established on the south side of Narrogin to accommodate the Immigrant families coming to Narrogin. The following is an extract from Maurie's writings; the highlighted words have been added to reflect research by Bob Sedlarczuk with input from his Mother Helen.

*The great majority of the hundreds who came to Narrogin lived initially in the "tent city" at the southern entrance to town. This consisted of ~~three~~ (four) camps – the Main Roads Camp, Railway **Camps 1 and 2** and the **Town Council Camp caravan park**. The first to arrive; rather bewildered young single men, appeared some time in 1948.*

It is understood that the Railway Tent Camp was still in operation after the Main Roads Camp had been closed. My Father in Law, Alexander Holm, was an Engineer with the WA Government Railways (WAGR) in Narrogin at the time the Railway camp was established. Soon after I married Alec's daughter Catherine, Alec told me that one of the projects for which he was responsible was the establishment of the Railway Tent Camp in 1950.

Emil Zabajnik, who was one of the older children at the time, remembers that most of the original families that lived in the Railway Tent Camp were transported to Narrogin from Northam on the back of a truck.

The camp had the most basic of toilet facilities, being the pan system, similar to many houses in Narrogin at that time. Pans were emptied once a week. At that time very few septic toilets had been installed in Narrogin.

There was no running water at the Railway Camp and people had to obtain their water from a large tank near the "Loco sheds" that provided water for the steam powered locomotives.

Conditions were not much better at the nearby Main Roads Camp in the Main Roads Depot opposite the Railway Dam. While they did have 6 relatively "modern" Nissen huts there were up to 5 families in some of the huts. Some Families also lived in small corrugated iron and weatherboard huts. In those days bitumen for roadworks was transported in 160 litre drums. After their contents had been poured into the bitumen kettles many of the drums had their ends cut out and the vertical walls of the drum were flattened to provide rust proofed cladding for some of the huts.

The camps accommodated a great number of very talented people. In his writings, Maurie White captured just how talented many of the new migrants really were. As well as University graduates there were a European Chess Grand Master, Opera singers and highly talented, professionally trained musicians among them. He also recorded that the local newspaper, The Narrogin Observer, ran 14 weekly biographies on the front page from May to September 1954. These told stories of people such as;

- Mr Aleksandar Petkovic, a former Yugoslav Army Captain and POW, who took over the Mardoc Guesthouse and became the first "New Australian" member of Narrogin Rotary;
- Mrs Nikolenko, the opera singer trained at the Ukranian Conservatorium of Music, who won the grand final of the Anchor Parade radio competition in 1954;
- Mr Venedict Kononenko, holder of the St. Georges Cross, Russia's highest decoration, who painted the replica of the Narrogin War Memorial for the local RSL;
- Mr Roelof Faber, a member of the Dutch Resistance during the German occupation of Holland who migrated to Australia to seek a better future for his son, and;
- Mr Bill Worsterling, a local builder, who had been a European Chess Master. He took on six other chess players from the local club at the same time and checkmated them all in less than one hour.

Two exceptionally good musicians who were very popular at all dances were Hilde Sorokiewicz and Gregorio Bulich who played piano accordions.

While soccer was the code of football played in all of the countries from which the Immigrants came, many of the sons of the Immigrants adapted very quickly to the Australian Rules code, with most of them playing for the Railways and Imperials Football Clubs. There were 2 notable exceptions, with Alby Timileris and Rene Pynenburg playing for Towns Football Club.

Many of the Fathers chose to play soccer. Wasyl (Bill) Sedlarczuk was a very talented player and provided leadership to a number of other players. At one stage he played for a Perth Club named Krakoa which consisted mainly of Polish players. The Narrogin Soccer team,

formed in the early nineteen fifties, consisted of all Immigrants coached by a Mr Weston. The team won many finals and in 1952 won the Final at a Carnival in Albany.

On Thursday 23 January 2015, the WA State Government issued a media statement advising of the State Heritage Listing of the former Main Roads Migrant Camp in Narrogin. A copy of the Media Statement is attached at **Appendix 2**.

Attached at **Appendix 3** is a copy of an email that I sent to the Minister for Heritage in support of the Listing of the Main Roads Migrant Camp in the Main Roads Depot as a State Heritage site.

A number of individuals who lived in Narrogin at the time, have recorded their recollections of the time. Some recollections of life in the camps have also been recorded. This is a “work in progress”, and the completed stories have been included in **Appendix 4**.

There is no doubt that the immigrants who came to Narrogin and their descendants have gone on to make a significant contribution to the town of Narrogin and Australia. The decision by the State Government to Heritage List the former Main Roads Migrant Camp in Narrogin has been well received by those Immigrants who came to Narrogin.

I believe that there is also a strong case to recognise the old Railway Campsite, in spite of the fact that there is now very little infrastructure there except for the old gravel track that provided access to the tents. Bob Sedlarczuk received strong support from the Narrogin Town Council and a number of people to erect a monument to the rail gang workers at the Railway Dam. The monument was designed by Bob and built by him with input of labour and materials by local people. Brookfield Rail provided sleepers, rails and a set of wagon wheels.

I feel that a simple Information Panel should be installed on the site of the original Railway Tent Camp to identify it as another important Immigrant Camp.

When Halina Filsell (Rozmianiec) provided me with her story of the Rozmianiec family, she included a reference to the Camps in which her parents were accommodated in Germany between the time the war ended and when they came to Australia. This made me think that arrival in Australia was only part of their story and that I should go back further to research a more detailed record of their whole story.

When I Googled; “Displaced Persons (DP) Camps in Europe”, I uncovered a whole host of interesting information. One site provided a list of all of the DP Camps in Germany, Austria and Italy, and which Sector; (British or American), they were located in. This information is now included in a dedicated Worksheet “Europe DP Camps” that is part of the database of “Narrogin Post War Immigrant Families”.

Most of the camps were former German military barracks that were no longer required because the German military personnel who survived the war had presumably gone home to their families.

There were also a number of Forced Labour Camps, Hospitals, Allied Prisoner of War Camps (Stalags) and Concentration Camps used to accommodate the estimated 4 million Displaced Persons. Some of the military barracks were used as hospitals so that care could be taken of the many survivors who had managed to survive unimaginable atrocities.

In an online article by Alan Newark of England [see **Appendix 5**] he records that;

Of 2.5 million DPs originally in the US zone, all but 600,000 had been sent home by the end of September, and General Wood reported the repatriation problem "substantially solved." But those who stayed were becoming a special problem, being a hard core of largely nonrepatriable stateless persons.

About half were Poles [Ukrainians from Poland], for years the most mistreated of the Nazi forced labourers and now torn between their desire to go home and their apprehension about the future awaiting them in Communist Poland.

Two years after the **end of World War II in Europe**, some 850,000 people still lived in DP camps across Europe, among them **Armenians, Poles, Latvians, Lithuanians, Estonians, Yugoslavs, Jews, Greeks, Russians, Ukrainians and Czechoslovaks.**

Growing up as a second generation Anglo Saxon Australian in Narrogin, I recall that the Immigrant Camps were occasionally referred to as the "Balts Camp." At the time I did not know or question the origin of the term, however in later years I assumed that it was a collective description of those countries that bordered on the Baltic Sea such as Poland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Russia.

While writing this essay I discovered in Wikipedia that "*the **Balts** or **Baltic** people (Lithuanian: baltai, Latvian: balti) are an Indo-European ethno-linguistic group who speak the Baltic languages, a branch of the Indo-European language family, which was originally spoken by tribes living in the area east of Jutland peninsula in the west and Moscow, Oka and Volga rivers basins in the east*".

More detailed information on the Balts from Wikipedia is provided in **Appendix 5**.

Some of the information contained in Appendix 5, obtained from the Internet, does not reflect very well on a small number of the Displaced Persons. Those of us who did not suffer at the hands of the Nazis have no idea of the trauma and suffering that the Displaced Persons endured. It must have been quite horrific to drive many decent but traumatised people who suffered very badly at the hands of the Nazis, to seek revenge against the German people either by stealing from them or in more extreme cases murdering them.

Even though the Immigrants who arrived safely in Narrogin could feel secure in their new country, many continued to experience grief and anxiety not knowing what may have happened to their friends and family who were now trapped behind "The Iron Curtain". Many of the new Immigrants died without ever knowing the fate of the loved ones left behind.

Halina Rozmianiec (Filsell) has told me that her mother never learned the fate of the 4 young daughters from her first marriage that she had to leave behind with her Mother when she was forcibly taken from Poland by the Nazis to work in a forced labour camp in Germany.

I have been very pleased with the way in which the former Mayor of Narrogin, Mr Leigh Ballard, CEO Aaron Cook and Council staff have embraced the concept of formally recording and recognising the many European immigrants who came to Narrogin and the contribution they and their descendants continue to make to the Town.

An application through the Town of Narrogin for a LotteryWest grant to fund a number of projects was approved. The most significant project was to install a bronze plaque in Narrogin's Memorial Park to recognise all of the many European Immigrants who came to Narrogin after the Second World War.

While the main focus of Memorial Park is to recognise the sacrifices made by many people from the District in the First and Second World Wars, I believe that it is appropriate that recognition also be given to the European Immigrants who were so brutally impacted by the Second World War. On Friday 4 November 2016, a ceremony will be held to unveil a bronze plaque in Memorial Park, by 2 surviving members of the original Immigrant group, Mrs Lena Sedlarczuk and Mrs Maria Samulkiewicz.

Some aspects of life in the Railway Tent Camp are outlined in **Appendix 6**.

There is no doubt that the original Immigrants and their descendants have made, and continue to make, a very valuable contribution to the development of Narrogin and Australia. Later generations should be proud of their heritage and value the sacrifices made by their forebears in contributing to the very fortunate lifestyle we all enjoy today.

Arrangements have been made with the Narrogin Manager of Library Services, Kay Weaver, for the database of European Immigrant Families and this essay to be available from the Narrogin Town Library website at www.narrogin.wa.gov.au under Library Services. Hard copy documents will also be available to read at the Library. They can also be accessed from the Lost Narrogin Facebook site.

Any corrections or suggested additions to this Essay can be sent to gary.norwell@inet.net.au .

Any corrections or additions to the Database can be sent to Bob Sedlarczuk at scossacks@bigpond.com

Acknowledgement.

I would like to formally acknowledge the very valuable contributions made to this essay by Bob Sedlarczuk and his Mother Lena (Helen). Without their input this essay would have lacked a lot of factual information. A significant amount of information has also been drawn from Maurie White's paper titled "Memorial II: Narrogin and World War II", in particular the section headed "The New Australians". This work contributed greatly to the early development of the Excel Spreadsheet that serves as our "Database."

Gary Norwell
October 2016.

Appendix 1

Maurie White's Tribute to "The New Australians"

The following text has been lifted word for word from Maurie White's publication "Memorial II: Narrogin and World War II". A section headed "The New Australians" is contained between pages 119 and 126 of Maurie's work. The names highlighted in yellow have been added to the Immigrant database that will be held on the Narrogin Town Library website.

As it turned out, a significant post-war boost for Narrogin came from a quite unexpected quarter. This was the arrival of migrants from Europe. The first to come, after the agreement between Australia and the International Refugee Organisation, signed on 21st July, 1947, were displaced persons, many with horrifying experiences in the war. These were followed by assisted migrants whose lives and prospects had been badly disrupted in war-torn Europe and who preferred to seek a new start in Australia. Hundreds of these migrant people came to Narrogin in the late '40s and early '50s. While many later moved on elsewhere, others stayed in town, and they and their descendants have made a notable contribution to the life and development of Narrogin.

As Fran Carter (Kuhlmann) recalls: "Narrogin really came alive with all those colourful people". Fran, a pupil at the Convent School in the late 1940s, found her imagination stirred by the sudden arrival of hundreds of European migrants, or "New Australians" as they became known. Few of them spoke much English and all of them had strange customs. Fran was fascinated by girls with plaited and braided hair, by their beautiful hand-sewn Holy Communion dresses, by the concentration camp numbers tattooed on the upper arms of some of the women. She remembers a 7-year-old boy drawing in the dust of the playground to indicate that he wanted a pair of compasses, and a voluptuous Dutch girl working in Coles in Federal Street. She also has a vivid memory of taking young Zygment Kaszubowski home to meet her family and how delighted the boy's mother was when Mrs Kuhlman wrote a friendly note and spelt his name correctly! With her friends Fran would stand on the street corner prattling double Dutch and pretending it was a foreign language. Above all, she was intrigued to see how hard the migrant parents worked, how they never wasted anything, how they gradually changed and integrated and acquired houses in the town.

Wally Malek, who had been a prisoner of the Germans and came to Australia when his native Poland became Communist, says that he and the other migrants regarded Australia as "heaven" and "paradise"; they were free and at last had a chance to rebuild their lives after years of deprivation. The country needed workers, and they were happy to work hard and play their part. Consequently for the first two years most of the men found themselves assigned to heavy manual labour with the Main Roads, Railways, Water Supply or Forestry Departments, the Land Settlement Scheme or local authorities. Their wives and families came with them, prepared to put up with tough living conditions until they could afford something better.

The great majority of the hundreds who came to Narrogin lived initially in the “tent city” at the southern entrance to town. This consisted of three camps – the Main Roads Camp, the Railway Camp and the Council Camp.

The first to arrive; rather bewildered young single men, appeared some time in 1948. Gwen Gartrell (Ingram), who lived in the first house on Mokine Road, remembers their tents suddenly springing up where the Main Roads Office stands today. The young fellows were most polite, but local girl’s mothers were naturally wary. Gwen and her sister Betty were instructed to have nothing to do with them – especially not to give them rides in their car. The girls disobeyed only once. One particularly hot Saturday morning they gave two of them a lift home from the shops; unfortunately a cabbage which Mum had not ordered was left in the car and all was revealed!

Within a short time many more migrants had arrived, and this Main Roads site west of the old Wagin Road which ran straight up the hill before turning left at Jimmie Gibson’s house, was filled with tents, corrugated iron structures and Nissan huts. Many of these later arrivals were family groups, and Gwen Ingram and her own family got to know many of them quite well – especially when they wanted the doctor. Language, of course, was a major problem for them, but when Dr Michael Slavin, a White Russian, came to Narrogin in June 1951 to practice with Dr Zilko, the migrants were delighted. Here was a doctor who could speak several of their languages. Consequently, they would come over to the Ingram’s house to use the telephone. As Gwen says, “it added an exotic touch to our little front room to have distraught migrant women pouring a dramatic stream of Russian or some other language down the telephone to the sympathetic Slavin ear!”

At about the same time, a much larger camp was set up in the bush across the Wagin Road. To establish this Railway Camp the Government resumed a paddock next to the Loco Sheds which was leased by Alan Hill. Wally Malek recalls that when he arrived in 1952 to work as a grader driver for the Shire the tent camp stretched on both sides of a dirt road almost down to the railway line. Beside each tent was a small kitchen, and four sheets of iron enclosing a bucket toilet which was emptied once a week. An ablution block stood towards the middle of the settlement with water drawn from the Railway Dam. Many tent dwellers had established small vegetable and flower gardens and kept a few fowls. Wally remembers being issued with a tent, mattress and a couple of blankets, and being allowed two days to set up a home under a big tree near the main road. Other belongings they “got as they could”, usually making furniture out of bits of wood and old crates from the dump.

Life at that camp seems to have been a rather colourful business. Charlie Buemi, Stan Samulkiewicz and others tell how the kids used to cling for thrills to the back of Durell’s bakery delivery van – and to the “dunny cart”; women relate the difficulties their mother’s had bringing up children and securing a little privacy in tents; Peter Samulkiewicz remembers the terrible night when a drunken Aborigine from a nearby encampment came through the tents with an axe looking for his wife; and Wally Malek recalls trouble with the neighbours. There was a time when a tent dweller’s chook scratched up his garden. He skimmed a stone to frighten it, but caught it behind the ear and “it just fell over”. That led to apologies and trouble. And then there was the cat which took his best pigeon. Wally caught and killed the animal and hung it on the fence. His neighbour, Mr Hruby, said “you done right thing!” – but then found out it was Mrs Hruby’s cat. More trouble!

Most of the migrant people left the camp as soon as they could, when their Railway 2 year contract expired, either acquiring a house in town or moving to other centres, but quite a few were still there in 1954.

By that time they had erected a conglomeration of rent-free canvas-and-iron structures which were branded as “Narrogin’s shanty-town”. This gave rise to health worries, but little could be done by the Railway Department or local authorities until the provision of new houses caught up with demand sometime after 1955.

There was also a third camp site at the southern end of town. The Council Camp was provided by the Narrogin Town Council on the site of the camping ground used by the unemployed during the Depression years of the 1930s. The four acre Council Camp was established in December 1951 on Lot 822, bounded by Fairway and Felspar Streets and the railway fenceline behind. It consisted of up to 24 camp sites arranged in a hollow square around a central ablution and laundry block. Most of these people were migrant families who had come to Narrogin from other centres to work on such essential projects as brick-making, tile-making and the Land Settlement Scheme. The camp ran for some five or six years until the acute need had declined.

In addition to the three camps on the Wagin Road there were also others around the district. One was out at Dryandra for men working with the Forestry Department. Another was in the Water Supply Reserve. Presumably this was the old camp site, now half covered by bush, which lies on the townward side of the water-storage tank up on the cemetery hill. Meanwhile Tony Boron and his wife spent two happy years, 1950 and 1951, out at Geeralying with six other families, where the men were employed clearing bush and cutting posts for the War Services Land Settlement Scheme as well as a little clearing for Bill Wiese. They paid two shillings a fortnight for their tent and had water and provisions brought to them. Ten years later Tony was cooking huge meals for the boarders at the Mardoc (*Guesthouse*) on the old Metters No 7 stove that is now in the barbecue area on Centenary Park.

Joe Zazulski, who arrived in April 1949, says that Narrogin people accepted the migrants pretty well – quite different, in fact, from his earlier experience at Fremantle where 500 local residents came down to the camp and “commented rudely”. However Narrogin citizens were naturally cautious. After all, the sudden influx of hundreds of non-British strangers with unpronounceable “wheelbarrow” names, foreign languages and unusual appearance, customs and habits was a very new phenomenon. Hence, when the Town Council decided to extend an official Christmas welcome to New Australians in their district, they did so with some misgivings.

That function in the Lesser Town Hall on Thursday evening, 22nd December 1949 was a real eye-opener. Local residents were utterly astonished to find that they were playing host to very friendly, courteous people who included musicians and folk dancers of quite extraordinary talent. In his lengthy report in the Observer, E.S. Hall gave special praise to the “ease of mastery” and “richness and power” of Polish violinist Wolodymyr Wirstiuk, and to “an artist of even greater quality”, the Latvian singer Igor Lappo. The latter, “a robust tenor with an extraordinary range”, working out his two years on a local farm, held his audience spellbound with “compositions which are not generally heard outside an opera house”.

Once the ice was broken, many townspeople became very interested in the New Australians. Gwen Gartrell, for instance, was fascinated by Erika Saare: "She was a clever lady – I believe a University graduate... and she was interested in dress design and fashion. She and her husband Eric were both tall, fair, blue eyed. She had wonderful bone structure, good teeth and always looked as though she had just stepped out of the shower. Not the kind of person one would expect to find living in a tent between the old 'loco' sheds and the railway dam".

Frank and Ethel Crabb became close friends of several migrant couples. Among them were Henry Pala, who worked in Dutchy McBeath's gang on the railways, and his wife Vivi who had a job at the Hordern. Henry and Vivi were Estonians who had survived a terrible ordeal. They had been picked up as refugees and herded into a camp where an escape tunnel was being built under a chapel started by a priest. Vivi had escaped but was caught again, trussed up and whipped so savagely on the back that deep scars remained years later. Henry had slipped out of the camp, cut her free and hid her in the tunnel until they could escape together. There were many such harrowing experiences suffered by people who eventually came to the Narrogin migrant camps.

A great number of the migrant families were Catholics, so that the majority of the children attended the Convent school in Narrogin. Five-year-old Anna Sawicka arrived first, and was taken in as a boarder in February 1950. Six months later came two Polish lads aged 13 and 12, Cesary and Josef Chrorazyczewski, followed in September and October 1950 by Wolodymyr and Mykolay Titko, Henryk and Zygment Kaszubowski and Jenowefa Stec.

The beginning of the 1951 school year brought Marian Zajda, Katarzyna and Stanislaw Pochroj, Karin Austen, Ella Bereza, Helen and Maria Radnai, and the Zabajnik brothers John, William and Emil. After that they kept coming right down to 1957, far too many to list here. Trying to cope with the influx of numbers and the language problems put a huge strain on the sisters, but their efforts earned praise from men who inspected their work such as Father Depiazzi and Superintendent Horner. Life wasn't made easy for the children either when some of the Aussie kids got "stuck into them". Frank Buemi comments that "being a migrant boy was quite trying as the kids that went to the State School were quite vocal with their thoughts of New Australian children, particularly if they attended the 'Convent'". And Stan Samulkiewicz remembers how he would be punished for coming home from school with a ripped shirt, done by school kids who objected to his krakoerwurst sandwiches and called him a "garlic muncher". Stan grins when he points out that "foreign" food is now fashionable in Australia.

However, once the difficulties were overcome the migrant children were accepted and soon began to make their mark, especially on the sports field. For instance the Observer's account of the Convent sports in October 1952 lists Janina Smal, Frank Hladio, and Steve and Mary Nigoschik among the placegetters. And an appealing photo published in the Saint Matthews commemorative booklet in 1988 shows Billy Rybarczyk, Richard Gornik and Richard Miskiewicz emerging as senior champions in about 1963.

In time the migrants were both entitled and encouraged to seek Australian citizenship. The earliest ceremonies were bleak affairs conducted in the local police court, but in 1954 the

Immigration Department suggested that local authorities should take over this role and make the proceedings more welcoming.

Consequently the first naturalisation ceremony conducted by the local governing bodies in Narrogin was held on Tuesday 30th November 1954. In the Council Chambers, which were warmly decorated with carnations, palms and two huge Union Jacks and the Australian flag, two ladies made their vows and received their certificates of citizenship. They were Mrs Anna Vavra from Czechoslovakia and Mrs Rudy Tassell (nee Jorritsma) from The Netherlands.

Warm speeches were made by Mayor Tom Hogg, Road Board Chairman Ernie Wiese and other dignitaries, and each lady received a huge bouquet of gladioli from the Mayoress and the Bible on which she had just sworn allegiance to Queen Elizabeth II. Those bibles were rather special. Bound in scarlet leather and with crowns and the royal cipher emblazoned on the covers, they were exact replicas of the one presented to Her Majesty upon her coronation in June the previous year. [1953].

For the next two years similar but less elaborate ceremonies were conducted before Town Council meetings when many more people were naturalised. Among them were Aleksandar Petkovic, Arie den Toom , and Josif and Stanislawa Zazulski in April 1955; Lida Prawosud and Anna Zajac that August; Jozsef Telek, and Felicja and Zbigniew Ostrowski in September; Hryhory Prawosud, Jamars Macins and Leonard Hovich in October; and Bogumil Chmielewski, Halyna Prawosud, Joseph and Elizabeth Kokai, and Stephanie and Wladyielan Lemierz in December. In September 1956 Zofia Galus and Dmytro and Bryna Matveev were also naturalised.

Even more significance was accorded to the New Australians' decision to become Australian citizens by making the ceremony public. Hence, on Friday, 22nd February, 1957 the first public naturalisation ceremony was held in the Town Hall. Besides the officials and the new citizens the hall was comfortably filled with family members, friends, Scouts, Guides, Cadets and other interested people. The thirteen naturalised that evening were;

- Mr and Maria Misko
- Mychajlow and Boris Schukowsky
- Pieter and Margaretha Van Der Zwaag
- Maria and Emil Zabajnik
- Alexander Fodor
- Michael Galus
- Johanne Alwine
- Erika Hasard
- Jonas Siedlovskas

At least another two major ceremonies were held. On 17th September 1957 a further 24 people were naturalised;

- Jan and Helena Miskiewicz
- Ferenc, Anna and Magdalena Auth
- Josef and Kathe Salata
- Wacław and Mina Rosiejak

- Leonty and Anna Fomenko
- Olev and Erika Saare
- Anna Nigoscik
- Josef and Leonkadia Fic
- Adriaan and Anna Bank
- Antonio Buemi
- Dobrijovc Stefanovich
- Nicola Ottobrinio
- Jan Van Der Schoor
- Milasin Pavlovic
- Libero Bright

And on the 4th March, 1958 Mayor RG Nicholson conducted the ceremony at which yet another 16 became Australian citizens;

- Nikolof and Maria Plahov
- Wadyslaw and Franciszka Mrowczynski
- Gunter Holle
- Mieczyslaw and Elizabeth Pomykala
- Johannes Numeijer
- Wadyslaw Rychal
- Antonio Biundo
- Dmytro Pylypiw
- Roelof Faber
- Wasyl Dardus
- Egbert Helmhout
- Leon Wadyslaw Bak and
- Vittorio Spina.

The migrant era was a very important and colourful one in Narrogin's history, and one that deserves a more detailed treatment than this book can provide. People who are interested are urged to ask questions themselves or to take a trip to Perth and read the microfilmed copies of the Narrogin Observer at the Battye Library.

When talking to the older migrants one hears some wonderful tales. This one, for instance, comes from Tony Reitmajer who, before coming to Australia, spent three years with the American Army of Occupation in Germany after the war. Arriving in Narrogin in the '50s he lived in the Railway camp and worked in the goods shed. One day there was a problem: the truck driver had broken his arm, they had no relief driver, and perishables had to be delivered. "I drive a truck", said Tony and they were happy to let him do so. This continued for several months until he was asked for his licence. German – yes; American – Yes; Australian – No. He was sent to the Police Station to get one. The sergeant summed up the situation and asked Tony if he had a vehicle. "it's standing outside". When the sergeant saw the truck he asked no more questions – just wrote out the licence and even allowed Tony to pay the ten shilling fee out of his next pay!

And when reading the Narrogin Observers from the '50s one gains fascinating glimpses of people and events. There was, for instance, a series of 14 biographical articles published on

the front pages between May and September 1954.

These tell the stories of people such as Mr Aleksandar Petkovic, former Yugoslav Army Captain and POW, who took over the Mardoc and became the first New Australian member of Narrogin Rotary; Mrs Nikolenko, the opera singer trained at the Ukranian Conservatorium of Music, who won the grand final of the Anchor Parade radio competition in 1954; Mr Venedict Kononenko, holder of the St. Georges Cross , Russia's highest decoration, who painted the replica of the Narrogin war Memorial for the local RSL; and Mr Roelof Faber, a member of the Dutch Resistance during the German occupation of Holland who migrated to Australia to seek a better future for his son.

Those papers tell of many other events of that time. There was, for instance, the fine work on behalf of migrants carried out by the local branch of the Good Neighbour Council, created in Narrogin on 20th October 1953 and headed by President Ron Reilly and Secretary C. Roenfeldt. There were also the excellent chess players – among them men whose surnames were Worsterling, Barendrecht, Bouvenkerk, Breitreusz, Nikolenko, Gawronski, Jorritsma, Petkovic, Slegt, Dobert, Riebeling and Samulkiewicz. Bill Worsterling, a local builder, had been a European Chess Master, and the Observer recorded on 22nd May, 1953 that Bill took on six other players from the local club at the same time and checkmated them all in less than one hour!

And then there were the numerous stories of road accidents. The lack of a footpath towards the Railway Camp probably contributed to young Bron Sniegowski being knocked down by a hit-and-run driver in May 1954, and when little five-year-old Irka Motacki was run over by a car and killed when alighting from a school bus in April 1953. The children of both schools lined the route to the cemetery during the funeral. In the early '50s there were so many car and motorcycle accidents around Narrogin that the young migrant drivers and riders were dubbed the "Temporary Australians".

Government of Western Australia – Press Release/Statement (January 2015)

Headline: Western Australia's migrant history celebrated

The important story of Western Australia's post-World War II migrants has been celebrated with the State heritage listing of the former Main Roads Migrant Camp in Narrogin.

Heritage Minister Albert Jacob said the camp housed European migrants who had been displaced by the war and resettled in WA.

"The camp marks a significant turning point in Australian history, when the Australian Government worked together with the United Nations to accept, resettle and provide employment for many thousands of Europeans after World War II," Mr Jacob said.

The camp was the first home to numerous migrants in WA, many of whom went on to become Australian citizens.

"In the lead up to Australia Day, the heritage listing of the migrant camp highlights the diverse cultures and backgrounds that together make this State unique," the Minister said.

"The camp's conditions were basic, with migrants living in tents and semi-cylindrical corrugated iron structures known as Nissen Huts. These Nissen Huts are the only remaining ones, in their original location, known for their historical use as temporary migrant accommodation."

Mr Jacob said the camp was one of three migrant camps set up in Narrogin in the late 1940s and used until the mid-1950s.

"These post-war migrants played a vital role in the development of the State through the construction of State and local government buildings, roads and railways," he said.

"After leaving the camps at the end of their work contract, many of the migrants remained in the local area, building or buying houses in town and getting jobs in the local community. Generations of these families still remain residents of the district today.

"This registration is an excellent example of the rich variety of places entered in the State Register of Heritage Places that tells the story of WA's history and development."

Today, the place is used by Main Roads WA as their Wheatbelt South Region Headquarters.

Appendix 3

Email from Gary Norwell to Heritage Minister Albert Jacob

Dear Minister,

As a former resident of Narrogin and an employee of Main Roads for 43 years, I must say that I was very pleased to see that the Main Roads depot in Narrogin has been recognised as a Heritage site to acknowledge the large number of European Immigrants who lived in temporary accommodation on the site.

You may be interested to know that for the past 4 years I have been working on a database with another former Main Roads employee named Bob Sedlarczuk, whose parents lived in the tent camp on railway land. I believe that this site is just as worthy of Heritage listing as the Main Roads site.

Bob and I have developed a database of all of the immigrants that came to Narrogin after the Second World War. We have acquired the information from a number of sources including Bob's mother Helen who still lives in Narrogin, former Narrogin High School teacher Maurie White's writings "Memorial II: Narrogin and World War II" and Narrogin Cemetery Records. To date we have identified 235 families and individuals who came to Narrogin. The database has been designed to capture the names and countries of origin of the parents and their children. In numerous cases the parents came from different countries.

It is planned that in the near future our database will be posted on the "Lost Narrogin" Facebook site with a request for more information to fill in the many gaps that still exist and any corrections, mainly spelling errors, which are required.

Bob has spoken to a number of people about erecting a plaque on the site of the old railway tent camp site to record the names of the original families who lived there. He has received strong support.

It would be appreciated if you could advise me as to whether a plaque could be funded partly or wholly through a Government Heritage Grant, and if so, how an application can be lodged.

Best wishes,

Gary Norwell. January 2015

Recollections of Individual Family Members

General

This section records the stories of some of the many Post War Immigrants who came to Narrogin during the late nineteen forties and early fifties. This was driven by my personal feeling that there was a need to understand the circumstances under which these people came to Australia and recognise the contribution made to Narrogin and Australia by those families who went to Narrogin. Another personal interest is the fact that my wife Catherine's Father, Alexander Holm, was an Engineer with WAGR in Narrogin at the time and was responsible for establishing the tent camp on railway land at the south end of town in 1950.

The following notes also include recollections of people who were not European Immigrants such as Doug McGay whose father Jack owned a General Store and delivered groceries to the camps. Peter Martinovich who worked for WAGR/Westrail as an Engineer has also provided his recollections of a bridge and culvert gang that included a high proportion of European Immigrants. Murray Slavin has also provided some notes on the relationship his father Dr Michael Slavin developed with the European Immigrants.

Kozicki Family (Provided by daughter Danuta)

Mrs Wladyslawa Kozicki [nee Kotowicz] was born in Targowica, County Dubno, in Poland. During the war she lived in Warsaw with her Uncle and Aunt until she was taken by the Nazis at 15 and forced to work on a farm. She told her daughter Danuta that the people who owned the farm treated her as well as they could.

Mr Marion Kozicki was born in Oswiecimi Poland and went into the Polish Army when he was just 14 where he started an apprenticeship as a Fitter and Turner. In the early years of the War Marion was seized by the Nazis and put to work in a forced labour camp.

At the end of the war, Marion and Wladyslawa met in the Bockhorn Camp for Displaced Persons in Germany. They were married on 5th October 1947 in Bockhorn. Their first child Danuta was born in Hans Oldenburg on 7th May 1948. After the end of the War, Marion was employed as a driver for the Colonel of the British Military Police.

Marion, Wladyslawa and Danuta arrived at Fremantle on the passenger ship Skaugum on 10th July 1950. They were transferred to the Northam Army Camp where they stayed until they were transferred to Narrogin in 1951 where they lived in the Main Roads Camp that consisted of 6 Nissen huts and tents. Their second daughter Elisabeta (Betty) was born in Northam on 31st October 1950. Their only son Tadeus (Ted) was born in Narrogin on 20th January 1952. Marion was employed by the Main Roads Department until he transferred to the WA Government Railways in 1966. Like many other immigrants, Marion was bound to Main Roads for a standard 2 year term. Marion worked for the Railways until he retired in 1979.

The family moved into a State Housing Commission house at 47 Kipling Street in 1955.

Alexandrow Family (Provided by Daughter Valentina & Son Wladimir (Wally))

Adam and Katerina Alexandrow were both from Belarus. Before the war they both lived in a small village called Starye Doroge near Minsk in Belarus and were married on 22 November 1942.

After leaving the Displaced Persons Camp in Germany, Adam and Katerina, with their two children Valentina (Val), aged 6 (born 20 September 1943 in Belarus) and Wladimir (Wally), aged 4 (born in Germany 4 July 1946) arrived in Fremantle on the passenger ship "Fairsea" on 2 March 1950. The port of departure was Naples, Italy. They arrived in Australia with a wooden trunk full of European winter clothing and bedding that was of no use in Australia.

The family was transferred to the Northam Army Camp for two months, then transferred to Cranbrook where Adam started work for the WAGR as a Repairer on 26 May 1950. The family lived in tents alongside the railway line with six other families.

Six months after their arrival in Australia the first Australian Alexandrow was born on 10 September 1950 at Mt Barker Hospital. The baby girl was named Nina. Tragically, Nina died at 3 months on 7 December 1950. Their fourth child, a son Peter, was born on 26 December 1951 also at Mt Barker Hospital.

In Cranbrook their life as "New Australians" really started. They were welcomed by the small local community and were taught the ways of the "Aussie". Life long friends were made from their short and happy time in Cranbrook.

While in Cranbrook, Adam was encouraged by the local teacher (Mrs Campbell) to undertake correspondence classes, which he kept up for many years. After 3 ½ years in Cranbrook, Adam was transferred by the WAGR to Narrogin with a promotion to Ganger Class 3.

In Narrogin the family lived in the Railway tent camp along with 10 other families, until a State Housing Commission house in Fox Street became available. Adam and Katerina were naturalized Australian citizens on 26 January 1959. They built their new home at 27 Homer Street, Narrogin and were both proud to be Australian.

While in Narrogin, Katerina worked as a housemaid for the Cornwall Hotel for many years and contributed (like a lot of migrant women) towards their new home.

By the time Adam retired on 28 April 1986 he had worked for the WA Government Railways for 36 years. He retired in the capacity of Inspector Permanent Way, Civil Engineering Branch, Bunbury.

Adam passed away 11 June 2002, aged 78 at Bunbury
Katerina passed away 19 August, 2005 aged 81 in Perth.

Rozmianiec Family (Provided by Daughter Halina)

Wincenty and Maria Rozmianiec were both Polish. Before the war, both Wincenty and Maria lived in Nowe Swiecziany. In 1939 Wincenty was sent by the Nazis to Germany to work as a labourer. Maria was sent by the Nazis to Germany to work in a textile factory, leaving behind 4 young daughters from her first marriage with her mother. Maria's mother died in 1947 and the 4 girls had to fend for themselves. After the war ended, Maria tried unsuccessfully to contact her 4 daughters but no mail was getting through. The Russians were not allowing any information to get in to relatives.

After Wincenty and Maria died in Australia, their daughter Halina finally found family members in Lithuania and Latvia.

When the war was over Wincenty and Maria were placed in the Wildflecken Camp in Bavaria in the south of Germany. Their 3 children Henryk, Halina and Wiktor Jerzy (*George*) were born in Germany in refugee camps in Kassel and Wildflecken. Wincenty and Maria and their 3 children arrived at Fremantle on the Fairsea on 2 March 1950. After arriving at Fremantle they were transferred to Northam for a short period. From there they moved to Toolibin where Wincenty commenced work with the WAGR on 31 May 1950. He was transferred to Dudinin in August 1951 where Wincenty worked as a Ganger for the WA Government Railways. While living in Toolibin and Dudinin, the family lived in railway tent camps. Henryk and Halina went to school in Dudinin.

While living in Toolibin and Dudinin, Wincenty worked on farms on weekends, carting hay and picking mallee roots. The family lived on rabbits, wild ducks, pigeons and parrots.

In September 1958, Wincenty was transferred to Narrogin where his family lived at the back of the Mardoc Guest House, before moving to 6 Williams Road. They then moved to 7 Kipling Street Narrogin before moving into a State Housing Commission house at 54 Fox St.

Wincenty retired from the WAGR in November 1972 due to ill health. After retiring, Wincenty and Maria went to live with Halina in Bunbury. Wincenty's health was not good and he passed away on 4 Dec.1980. Maria lived another 4 years passing away 31 Dec.1984.

Sedlarczuk Family

Lena (Helen) Sedlarczuk (as told to her son Bogdan Wasyl (Bob) Sedlarczuk)

Lena Michalova was born on 8th of November 1926, in a village called Vyazma 200 kms from the city of Smolensk in USSR (Belarus). 1 of 4 children, Lena had 2 sisters Marika, Nina youngest and a middle brother Serha(Sir-He). At six years old she remembered her father Michal dying from a lung disease affecting his breathing after working in the damp dark old coal mines. Her mother Paula was very ill at the time also and as the oldest sister Lena had to look after them all. Apart from life being very hard and cold, that devastating day at only 12 years old the Nazi's came and collected all the young people. This was the last she saw

or heard from any of her family. She went one way the rest is unknown. God only knows where all her family are now and doubt very much she will ever know.

She worked the next 2 years or so as she remembered in a camp run by the Nazis. She mainly worked in the kitchen and although it was hard they were surprisingly treated pretty well. They were supervised mainly by their own but still had long hours, but as she once said, a few of the girls snuck out one night to a dance, were of course caught and paid some penalties (extra work). Mind you she suffers still now with back complaint from the hidings received with batons from some attendants such as in this case.

In 1945 the Germans were defeated and retreated so all were forced marched for days toward Germany. She clearly remembers that last night before they were to be lead in the next day's march into what was known as one of the death camps.

During the night she recalls, thankfully the British surrounded the village and Germans surrendered, resulting in all being transferred to camps in the war torn and heavily damaged Germany. There were large refugee camps and she first met her husband Wasyl (Bill) in a camp in Dusseldorf. During their stay in the camp, to obtain certain approvals and privileges, Dad had to refer to her as his sister most importantly because the Russians were searching for their own people to return them back to their homeland. By this time she was already settled with Dad and not wanting to return and seeking a better life outside of Europe. They soon married on March 4 1946 and started a family where she had her first baby son Pytro (Peter).

They were then transferred by rail to another camp as she remembers to be "**Essondorf**" where her second child, daughter Halina was born.

They had made some good friends in Germany but again these bonds had to end before departing on a ship named the Casablanca bound for Australia (Mr & Mrs Anthony Boron were on the same ship). Both Mum from Russia and Dad from the Ukraine, always used to tell stories of the beautiful country they were born in and lived their childhood. Because of what they had to endure and the experiences and damage war had delivered they vowed never to return. Their new adventure of life begun and unfortunately they had to move on and leave the few very good friends they made in the camps and lost loved ones behind, never to be seen or heard of again.

Dad knew his eldest & youngest brothers were killed whilst in the Ukraine army. Unknown to poor Dad, it was not until 2010 surprisingly enough that we had found out by internet and Facebook that the lost brother had left a nephew for him, a family whom is still residing in Buffalo New York. So some Sedlarczuk's live on over the other side of the world.

1948 saw the arrival of Mum and family to their new home land. They were supposed to go on the Sydney, but Dad by mistake got off the ship and his cases sailed off into the horizon. After seeing buildings on the mainland he decided to say good bye to their case as it only had some essential items in it. They were told that Australia had only bush and kangaroos. Mum and Halina had spent most of the trip struck by sea sickness so she was really happy to be on land!

After a few weeks in Perth they were transferred to the Northam camps. Due to his exceptionally good soccer skills, Dad was assigned to the kitchen duties to enable playing competition team soccer, he played for a Polish team Krakoa.

In 1950 a second son, Nicholi, was born and they then moved to Narrogin as Dad had to fulfil a 2 year "Free to Stay" railway work contract "snake charming" as it was known those days.

They were among many of the first European Immigrants that settled in a tent camp known as the Railway Camps. Conditions there were pretty ordinary and Mum used to say these detainees now have it good as all they had was a tent, 2 wire beds with straw mattresses, a blanket, and hurricane light and water bag.

They made do with that and "Shanty town" as it was known had only the bare essentials. Having to cart water in buckets from the overhead steam engine tank some 300 metres away. I took Mum back and walked the ground where this was not long ago but her memory was faded remembering only the ½ drum fire there and that when she exited from the tent she always remembered seeing Dad working on what is the Albany railway line at present. Still they made it do with a highlight of walking into town to the local Horden Hotel (migrants welcome here) or mainly to soccer dances which was their regular entertainment. During this time by 1952, I was born and some 12 months later the camp dwellers started to obtain town residence. Some building and like us we rented rooms at a boarding house at the rear of what is IGA which was run by a familiar local man Ike Kempton's Father Joe and Mother. By this time Dad had finished his contract with the railways and was working on the building of the high school for some 2 years. Mum did some cleaning work for Mr & Mrs Kempton which obviously helped the stay.

Like many immigrants from world war 2, they experienced very hard times but survived mainly due to their togetherness and interconnecting with other families, settled with their very hard work raised 4 children in those hard times of the 1950's to the 70's. Because Mum started and had nothing for a great portion of her life, she gave all to her family, loving and caring, worrying and helping and of course the odd belting not going astray.

Mid 50's the dream finally came true, we moved into a new state house 51 Kipling Street. Yes Mum & Dad had their home and hard times still followed as up keeping of the home, rents, schooling started to take its toll so Mum then started working at the hospital laundry. I can always remember prior to starting school Mum taking me with her to work. Mum spent most of her time (over 40 years) working in the Narrogin hospital laundry until in '92 she had an angina treatment discounting her from continued work. It is quite ironic that having worked so long in a hospital then had to be flown to Perth by RFDS because she could not get into one!

Best of all were the Sunday roasts done by the Metter's No 1 stove that Dad would always have to replace as she would not do without it. All the European foods we enjoyed and she would always give you a big helping and if you finished forced seconds down you. They never had this food in the early days, sometimes having to eat soup which was made from typical good field grass and guess that's why there was a lot of good food around when they finally become rich enough to provide and buy what they wanted, but there was never a drop or crumb wasted.

May 21 1994 saw the passing of Dad and later in 1996, because she could not continue to trim Dad's garden and maintain the old home easily, we sold 51 Kipling St and moved her into a grannie flat alongside Ron & Halina.

To this day although struggling a little, Lena still is self-sufficient, cooking, washing etc. and feeding her chooks.

Ostrowski Family (As told by daughter Alicia)

Zbigniew (Harry) and Felicja (Phyllis) Ostrowski (nee Kwiatkowska) – Poland-Wildflecken-Narrogin

Dad joined the Polish underground (AK) early on during the war when he was only 21/22 years old. As he was from Radom he mainly saw action in the Sandomierz region. When the war looked like it was coming to an end, dad knew that because of his role in many skirmishes against both the Germans and the Russians, he would be hunted by both so he decided to flee Poland and eventually made his way, via Czechoslovakia, to Germany where he eventually ended up in the DPP camp of Wildflecken, which was under the protection of the US Army having been taken over by them in April 1945 (it was previously a German army camp). A few months after the US Army took over, refugees from all over Europe starting arriving at the camp. Dad arrived in about 1946/47.

Mum was born in Warsaw in 1928 and following the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, she and her parents and brother were eventually found hiding in the country near Warsaw and deported to Germany to work in the factories. They were apparently referred to as “Warsaw bandits” by the Germans! She was separated from her parents and brother and eventually worked in a factory making parts for tanks in Dresden. Mum eventually ended up in Wildflecken probably in 1946 as she happened to be in the American zone but her parents were in the Russian zone and as she didn’t want to go back to a communist Poland, she stayed with the Americans but her parents and brother had to return to Poland. She never saw her parents again (although did have contact with them after the war) but did eventually meet up with her brother in Warsaw.

Mum and Dad met and married in the Wildflecken Camp in 1947 and started to make arrangements to migrate to the USA or Canada. This was a lengthy process as there were about 20,000 Poles waiting to be processed.

In early 1949 mum found out she was pregnant with me and was told that to go to America she would have to wait for me to be born then wait longer for my papers. They found that they could come to Australia straight away and so that’s what they decided to do.

They arrived in Fremantle on the 21st of May 1949 on the SS Mozaffari, which they boarded in Genoa having travelled by train from Wildflecken. The journey was rather harrowing as the men and women (whether you were married or not) were separated – women on one side of the ship and men on the other. For a while they were housed in Graylands. Dad quickly got a job with the Main Roads Department (they were forced to take jobs as quickly as possible because their trip to Australia had been free). As mum was pregnant, she did not have to find work. After a few weeks in Graylands they were sent to Narrogin where we lived for a while in the MRD camp and after a couple of years, they were given a State Housing Commission house at the top of Kipling Street. Life was hard as Dad was away all week, sometimes for two weeks at a time, and so we only saw him on weekends. He worked for the MRD for about 20 years.

I was born in August of 1949 and according to Mum, the first “new Australian” baby born in the Narrogin Regional Hospital (as opposed to the maternity hospital) because she had developed eclampsia and had started to get organ failure and needed an emergency Caesarean). This was a very hard time for my parents as it was hard to contact Dad as he was hundreds of miles away somewhere in the bush. Plus, with the language barrier, when Mum woke from the anaesthetic she had no baby with her and presumed that it (me) had died but because she had gone through a traumatic time, the nursing staff were waiting for her to ask for her baby. After two or three days, one of the nurses decided to ask Mum if she wanted her baby and somehow mum managed to convey to her that yes, she did and so Mum and I were reunited!

My brother George was born in 1952 and we lived in Narrogin for about 10 years before moving to Perth.

Peter Martinovich

Peter Martinovich was an Engineer with WA Government Railways and spent almost seven years in Narrogin from the beginning of 1975 to July 1981, and another six months in the first half of 1984.

During that time Peter was in charge of the major bridge and culvert replacement program which included railway bridges over the Dale and Arthur Rivers. Peter’s bridge gang consisted mainly of Polish immigrants and people from neighboring countries plus one Italian named Eddie Boni.

These men were very hard-working and Peter believes that the achievements of his gang helped progress his career significantly. The carpenter in charge of Peter’s team was George Kuszlik. George was one of the team chosen to build a new timber bridge on the transcontinental railway at Zanthus after a major washaway in March 1974 following a very destructive cyclone that caused extensive flooding on the North Eastern Goldfields. A Leading Hand was John Kopek.

Peter still sees one of the team, a Russian named Bazyli (Alex) Szewczenko. Peter’s gang had a Polish IWB named Jerzy (George) Dzuiba.

The gang’s chainman was an Estonian named Ivan Anatolik.

Peter Roscienjak was a mechanic in the Narrogin Ways and Works Yard.

Jack McGay (as recalled by his son Doug)

My late father, Jack McGay, owned a grocery and general store on the corner of Fortune and Rowley Streets, near the Post Office.

Dad enthusiastically adopted the new Australians and he certainly seemed a favourite amongst the migrant families. My childhood memories recall him being fair and welcoming with the newcomers. He learned a bit of their native languages – at least the names of the veggies, fruit and other produce! And made a point of pronouncing their names correctly, an achievement for an Aussie of any era. I can distinctly remember being taught my first word in a foreign language by Dad – “kartofle” (potato). I must have been 3-4 years old at the time.

Another memory is the cheerful banter at the store counter with the strange sounding ladies from the camps. There seemed to be a lot of laughter between dad, the staff and the migrants. I have even stronger memories of the butchers next door (Walker Bros) being even more hilarious with their customers.

Although I was very young at the time, I can remember riding out to the camps in the store's truck to deliver the grocery orders. My most distinctive memory is a feeling of being in a very strange and different environment. I recall not being too keen to get down out of the truck. My perceptions were that the MRD camp was the more open and less forbidding of the two we visited. The loco shed camp was much bigger and consequently more exotic to my young eyes.

My maternal grandfather, Lionel Oliver, was a guard on the railways. He contributed further to my recollections of the migrant community. I have abiding memories of going down to the loco sheds at 4am on cold mornings to board a train to go for a day trip out and back with Grandpa. What a wondrous place for a young kid of maybe 4-6 years old. Steam rising everywhere; “fireman” heaving in the coal; hissing engines as we walked down the carriages tapping the wheels for cracks. And of course just behind the loco sheds was the big migrant camp, all very mysterious and alien with tents, dim lights and people stirring in the pre-dawn light. Invariably, the firemen on those train trips were strapping young migrant men from the camps. It was incredibly hard work and they were the bottom of the totem pole of the train personnel, but I remember us all gathering around the engine at the changeover station of Hillman, and everyone eating their cut lunches and drinking billy tea, with large dollops of good humour.

When we commenced school, there were a lot of kids with strange names and different clothing. I remember someone even wearing clogs to school. But it seems to me that we took the names in our stride and correctly pronounced them from day one – even though as young Aussies we couldn't resist adding like-sounding-nicknames to a lot of them. But no more than we did with our own names!

In the early days there was a term “New Australian” that everyone seemed to use to cover the new migrant families. My recollection is that it was used almost with fondness and not with any malice.

I have a vivid memory of lining Williams Road with the whole school for the funeral of a little “New Australian” girl. I also remember my parents talking about the incident in very sad tones.

It seems to me that in a matter of 10-12 years the immigrants moved from such a challenging location and situation in a brand new country to being established and valuable, integrated community members. I think a lot of that can be put down to our generation – on both sides of the equation. By the time we got to high school any differences and cross-culture misunderstandings were pretty well gone. The families had moved out of the camps and into houses in town. The term “New Australian” had disappeared. I can’t remember it being used beyond the middle of primary school.

There is a lot to be said for the merchants, the community leaders, teachers and general environment of Narrogin that led to such a welcoming environment and ultimate integration of our migrant families from the other side of the world.

Dr Michael Slavin (As recalled by his son Murray)

Dr Michael Slavin was born to Jewish parents in Kharkov Ukraine in 1917, after which the family moved to Vladivostok in far-east Russia. His father manufactured pearl buttons in Japan for the Russian market. In 1923 when Michael was 6 years old he and his older brother Ben were smuggled out of Russia. After being reunited with their mother, they then began an eight-year trek as a displaced family moving through China, then Japan and back to China. In 1930 when Michael was 13 the family migrated to Melbourne. The family lived on a meagre income. While his mother ran a tobacconist booth in a shopping mall, he managed to gain an education through scholarships, first for secondary schooling, then to study medicine. He was never comfortable with the city, and as soon as he graduated, moved to the west where he was Registrar at Perth’s children’s hospital. He then took up a locum at Northampton. He eventually moved to Narrogin in June, 1951 where he entered partnership with Dr Mort Zilko. His birth name was Mischa and this was anglicised by his mother to Michael to try to help overcome some of the racial stigma and violence that prevailed in Melbourne when they arrived.

Michael’s wife Lilia (Lily) Emanuel was born in Moscow in 1921, also to Jewish parents. Her family was unusual for the time as it was not only strongly rabbinical, but it was also represented at senior Soviet levels. Her uncle Avram was the Soviet Cultural Attaché to China in the 1930s and other family members were senior military officers, doctors, and the like. She, along with her mother and younger brother Alex, moved to Australia in 1932 when she was 11 years old. Her father followed a few years later.

Both Michael and Lily were strong social advocates – probably strengthened by their own difficult early childhood experiences. They were often called upon by members of the indigenous and migrant communities to help in times of need – social, medical, financial, and even legal. Murray remembers going with his Father many times to the Immigrant camps. His Father used to take his medical bag and walk through the area to see if there was anyone in trouble. Many people were terribly shy because of the language problems and social stigma and were uncomfortable in situations where they had to try to use English.

Murray also remembers an incident at the 'Native' reserve, which his father visited on a regular basis to provide assistance. He was stopped by a particularly notorious police sergeant who demanded to see his 'permit'. In his typically gentle manner, Dr Slavin told the officer that he didn't need a permit as he was governed by his Hippocratic Oath – that his medical obligations overruled any other requirements.

Fortunately Dr Slavin could understand most of the languages of the Immigrants. This is recorded in paragraph 2 of Maurie White's Tribute to The New Australians on page 9 of this essay. However, there is one error: Dr Slavin was not a 'White Russian'. He held strong socialist views and, as did Lily's family, and fled the Soviet Union when Stalin began to purge earlier communist factions.

Gwen Ingram and her own family got to know many of the new Immigrants quite well – especially when they wanted the doctor. Language, of course, was a major problem for them, but when Dr Michael Slavin, a White Russian, came to Narrogin in June 1951 to practice with Dr Zilko, the migrants were delighted. Here was a doctor who could speak several of their languages. Consequently, they would come over to the Ingram's house to use the telephone. As Gwen says, "it added an exotic touch to our little front room to have distraught migrant women pouring a dramatic stream of Russian or some other language down the telephone to the sympathetic Slavin ear!"

Dr Slavin passed away in 2003 aged 86 after almost 60 years of continuous medical service to the nation. His wife Lilia passed away in 2015 aged 94. Their contribution to Australia is testimony to the benefits to be gained through a more sympathetic approach to displaced people.

Appendix 5

The following notes were downloaded from the Internet.

The DP Camps in Germany

DPs Crime And Related Problems Inside and Outside Camps (e.g. Bremen, north Germany and Polish DPs camp in Regensburg, Bavaria)

From: www.globalsecurity.com book excerpts.

Submitted by Alan Newark, England - UK.

The Germans attributed all violent crimes to the DPs; and military government reluctantly came close to agreeing with them. Of 2.5 million DPs originally in the US zone, all but 600,000 had been sent home by the end of September, and General Wood reported the repatriation problem "substantially solved."

But those who stayed were becoming a special problem, being a hard core of largely nonrepatriable stateless persons.

About half were Poles [Ukrainians from Poland], for years the most mistreated of the Nazi forced labourers and now torn between their desire to go home and their apprehension about the future awaiting them in Communist Poland. The rest were Balts, non-German Jews, eastern Europeans other than Poles, and - although many fewer than there had been - Soviet citizens, **most of whom tried to claim special status as Ukrainians.** USFET policy made repatriation entirely voluntary for all DPs except those who came from within the pre-1939 boundaries of the Soviet Union [i.e, Ukrainians]; many had legitimate reasons for not wanting to return, principally fear of political or religious persecution, such as being sent to Siberia. As the total number of these displaced persons declined, however, the percentage of doubtful types among those who remained, such as criminals and Nazi collaborators, constantly increased, as did their influence on the others. A questionnaire, similar to the *Fragebogen* used for the Germans, tried on 240 DPs in a camp at Regensburg, Bavaria, revealed that 40 percent, if they had been Germans, would have been in the mandatory removal category, that is, unemployable in responsible positions and possibly subject to arrest.

Wikipedia

The **Balts** or **Baltic** people ([Lithuanian](#): baltai, [Latvian](#): balti) are an [Indo-European ethno-linguistic](#) group who speak the [Baltic languages](#), a branch of the [Indo-European language](#) family, which was originally spoken by tribes living in area east of [Jutland](#) peninsula in the west and [Moscow](#), [Oka](#) and [Volga](#) rivers basins in the east.

One of the features of Baltic languages is the number of conservative or archaic features retained.^[1] Among the Baltic peoples are modern [Lithuanians](#), [Latvians](#) (including [Latgalian](#)) — all Eastern Balts — as well as the [Old Prussians](#), [Yotvingians](#) and [Galindians](#) — the Western Balts — whose people also survived, but their languages and cultures are now extinct, and are now being assimilated into the Eastern Baltic community.

Origins

The Balts or Baltic peoples, defined as speakers of one of the Baltic languages, a branch of the Indo-European language family, are descended from a group of Indo-European tribes who settled the area between the lower Vistula and upper Daugava and Dnieper rivers on the southeast shore of the Baltic Sea. Because the thousands of lakes and swamps in this area contributed to the Balts' geographical isolation, the Baltic languages retain a number of conservative or archaic features.

It is possible that around 3,500–2,500 B.C., there was massive migration of peoples representing the [Corded Ware culture](#). They came from the southeast and spread all across Eastern and Central Europe, reaching even southern Finland. It is believed¹ that [Corded Ware culture](#) peoples were [Indo-European](#) ancestors of many Europeans, including Balts. It is thought that those Indo-European newcomers were quite numerous and in the Eastern Baltic assimilated earlier indigenous cultures (Europidic cultures – [Narva culture](#) and [Neman culture](#)). Over time the new people formed the Baltic peoples and they spread in the area from the Baltic sea in the west to the [Volga](#) in the east.

Some of the major authorities on Balts, such as [Būga](#), [Vasmer](#), [Toporov](#) and Trubachov, in conducting etymological studies of eastern European river names, were able to identify in certain regions names of specifically Baltic provenance, which most likely indicate where the Balts lived in prehistoric times. This information is summarized and synthesized by [Marija Gimbutas](#) in *The Balts* (1963) to obtain a likely proto-Baltic homeland.

Its borders are approximately: from a line on the [Pomeranian](#) coast eastward to include or nearly include the present-day sites of [Berlin](#), [Warsaw](#), [Kiev](#), and [Kursk](#), northward through [Moscow](#) to the River Berzha, westward in an irregular line to the coast of the Gulf of Riga, north of [Riga](#).

Among all categories of DPs, uncertainty about the future, free rations and lodging without having to work for them, privileged status under the occupation, and virtual immunity from the German police bred indolence, irresponsibility, and organized criminality.

Their access to Army, United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency ([UNRRA](#))^[1] and Red Cross supplies made them potent operators in the black market; the camps provided havens for black market goods and bases for criminal gangs; and the Army-issue clothing that most of them wore was excellent camouflage for the criminal elements and an effective means of intimidating the Germans.

The 100,000 or more DPs who did not live in camps or who drifted in and out of them at will constituted the nucleus of a kind of Army-sponsored underworld. Even the former concentration camp inmates were becoming an annoyance. Many persisted in wearing their convict uniforms and were willing to regale any newspaper reporter who would listen with supposed new atrocities being inflicted upon them by the Army. Some were trying to make their privileged status permanent by having official-looking documents drawn up and badges made.

At the same time, stories about the DPs in US newspapers were making them objects of particular public and official sympathy. In the summer the US representative on the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, Earl G. Harrison, visited the camps as President Truman's special emissary and recommended setting up separate camps for Jews. Later, after Saul S. Elgart of the American Joint Distribution Committee surveyed the Jewish camps, UNRRA undertook to distribute Red Cross packages to the Jews, thereby raising their ration to over 3,000 calories a day.

In September, Eisenhower personally inspected several DP camps and announced that general officers would inspect all camps. Although the inspections showed the camps in general to be adequate and the larger ones often excellent with kindergartens, chapels, medical facilities, electric lights, flush toilets, and average food rations above 2,100 calories a day, the press and public concern did not abate.

In late September, Eisenhower ordered the military government and military authorities to requisition housing for DPs from the Germans without any hesitancy, prohibited any restrictions on the DPs' freedom of movement, and made food and sanitation in the camps a concern of all responsible officers.

As a consequence, the Office of Military Government for Bavaria reported later, "there were so many inspections by generals, public health officers, correspondents, and other privileged emissaries of interested organizations that the objects of scrutiny themselves cried for a respite."

Upon hearing of the order to let the DPs come and go as they pleased, the detachment in charge of 15,000 in a camp at Wildflecken, Bavaria, observed that considering the marauding and looting which had taken place when only 1 percent a day were allowed to leave, it looked to the future "with great concern."

The detachment's apprehension was not unfounded. DP depredation was the chief reason for rearming the German police in September; until then, they had only carried nightsticks. Military government recorded 1,300 DP raids against Germans in Bavaria during one week in October, and in some country districts people were afraid to leave their houses even in the daytime.

Many farm communities found a new use for old air raid sirens: to warn of approaching DP bands. In Munich, DPs constituted 4 percent of the population but were responsible for 75 percent of the crimes.

Military government courts in Bavaria held 2,700 trials between 1 June and 30 October in which displaced persons were accused of serious crimes, such as murder, robbery, and looting; and in Bremen, a DP population of 6,000, **3,500 of them males over fourteen years of age committed 23 murders, 677 robberies, 319 burglaries, and 753 thefts.** Organized gangs armed with pistols and automatic weapons operated out of the Bremen camps. When an eight-man gang murdered thirteen Germans during one night in November, soldiers of the 115th Infantry raided the camp from which they had come and uncovered large quantities of illegally slaughtered beef and US property. Afterward, in protest, the DPs flew black flags and placed large signs at the camp entrance reading "American Concentration Camp for Poles."

Next to the black market and the DPs, **German youths were military government's most worrisome concern.** Many children were completely adrift, orphaned by the war, unable to find their families, or simply abandoned. All were idle. Schools were closed; youth organizations, other than a few sponsored by the US forces, were prohibited; and entertainment and recreation facilities were requisitioned for the US troops. The worst off- and most dangerous in the eyes of military government-were those in their late teens.

Although too young to have served in the *Wehrmacht* and experienced the sobering effects of defeat in the field, they were old enough to have absorbed Nazi attitudes. The *Freikorps* and the Nazi storm troops had found many recruits among a similar group after World War I. Under the occupation, these young people were becoming sidewalk loafers. They could not continue their educations or learn trades, and the only jobs being offered involved cleaning up rubble, which was not enticing in either the short or the long run. So they gathered out of the sight of the Americans, made up bawdy verses about the behavior of the US soldiers and German girls, at times threatened to shear the hair of girls who had soldier friends, and sometimes, military government officers suspected, rigged decapitation wires or attempted acts of sabotage. Their activities were all quite amateurish but might not remain so once enough young, but more experienced, prisoners of war returned home.

http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/other/us-army_germany_1944-46_ench19.htm

At first the Germans seemed too stunned and, as the summer wore on, too preoccupied with day-to-day existence to think about the future. When the harvest was in and the daily ration barely above 1,200 calories, when the weather turned cold and there was no coal, when the farmers and other producers became increasingly unwilling to part with their products for money, the people, as the Wuerttemberg-Baden Office of Military Government reported, sank "deeper and deeper into despair as they saw a cruel, cold, hungry winter ahead." The harvest, all things considered, had been a good one but could not under any circumstances have been good enough to feed the zone population throughout the winter. Coal output in the British and French zones had increased, but the rail and water transport systems were only able to move about 60 percent of the coal away from the mines.

The US zone received half a million tons in August but only 150,000 tons more in December, just enough to run the railroads and essential public utilities. When cold weather came, military government in Stuttgart and other places requisitioned all coal supplies over a quarter ton, and throughout the zone children were required to bring a piece of firewood with them to school each day to heat the classrooms.

More about European Theatre DPs and Allied military leaders' measures in support of DPs.

http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/other/us-army_germany_1944-46_ch23.htm#b2

Bergen-Belsen displaced persons camp

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Scene of the liberation on 17/18 April 1945 in KZ Bergen-Belsen

Bergen-Belsen displaced persons camp was a [displaced persons \(DP\) camp](#) for refugees after [World War II](#), in [Lower Saxony](#) in northwestern [Germany](#), southwest of the town of [Bergen](#) near [Celle](#). It was in operation from the summer of 1945 until September 1950. For a time, Belsen DP camp was the largest Jewish DP camp in Germany and the only one in the British occupation zone with an exclusively Jewish population.^{[1][2]:34}

Location and establishment

On 15 April 1945 the [British](#) Army liberated the [Bergen-Belsen concentration camp](#), which was handed over by the SS guards without a fight. Diseases and the terrible hygienic state of the concentration camp buildings caused the British Army to relocate the former inmates and eventually to burn the prisoner huts.^[1] The survivors of the concentration camp became the first residents of the future DP camp, which was around 2 kilometres from the main concentration camp area, in a former [German Army](#) barracks.^{[1][2]:60}

Initially, the British medical staff used buildings in the former *Panzertruppenschule* (school for Panzer troops) as an emergency hospital to treat the former inmates away from the disastrous conditions of the concentration camp.^[3] On April 21 the first patients were moved to the new location, disinfected and issued with new clothing.^[3] This movement of people was completed by May 18 and at that point the former barracks had around 12,000 hospital beds.^[3] The British also moved the wounded German soldiers from the Wehrmacht *Reservelazarett* (reserve hospital, in a nearby spruce forest) to civilian hospitals and added the *Reservelazarett* to their hospital space.^[3] This raised the number of available beds by a further 1,600.^[3] Within the first four weeks almost 29,000 survivors from Belsen concentration camp were moved to the emergency hospital.^{[2]:28} Around 14,000 former inmates died after liberation despite the best efforts of the British Army, the British Red Cross and many others of various nationalities.^{[2]:29} By June 1945, around 11,000 of the former inmates still required emergency treatment.^{[4]:305}

The DP camp was established in July 1945 ^[1] by turning the hospital wards into living quarters.^[5]

After summer 1945, only the former Wehrmacht hospital, around a kilometre from the barracks, was still used as a hospital. ^[6] In January 1948, the British turned this into the central Jewish hospital for their occupation zone.^[6] It was run by the Central Committee of Liberated Jews, supported by aid organisations.^[6] The survivors named it the *Glyn Hughes Hospital* after British Brigadier Hugh Llewellyn Glyn Hughes, the medical officer of the 11th Armoured Division.^[6] Later still this became part of the *Glyn Hughes Barracks*, in what is now Hohne-Camp.^[7]

The British authorities tried to rename the camp *Hohne* to avoid the association with Nazi genocide at the concentration camp nearby, but the Holocaust survivors who were residents (*Sh'erit ha-Pletah*) in the camp refused to accept the name change and persisted in calling the DP camp *Bergen-Belsen*.^[1] The name change only stuck after the DP camp was dissolved and the area was returned to military use. Today, the location of the former DP camp remains off-limits to the public. Even though many of the buildings are not in use anymore, they are in a restricted military area.^{[2]:60–65}

Camp culture and politics

Conditions in the camp were initially quite poor, as the dire situation of the British economy prevented the Army from providing more than the bare necessities at first.^{[4]:326} There was not enough food, clothing and living space. In October 1945, there was a hunger strike and demonstration against conditions in the camp.^{[4]:326} Things started to improve only by the summer of 1946, when the population had decreased.^{[4]:326}

Many of those DPs who were not in need of medical attention were speedily repatriated. In general, this was done voluntarily only, with the notable exception of Soviet citizens — as the Soviet Union had obtained consent from its Allies that its citizens would be sent back even against their own will.^{[2]:29} In early September 1945 there were still more than 25,000 people in the DP camp.

This population consisted mainly of two groups: (gentile) Poles (around 15,000) and Jews (almost 11,000), most of them also from Poland.^{[2]:29} DPs of other nationalities were largely repatriated by the fall of 1945.^{[4]:308}

The Polish camp

From June 1945 Poles and Jews had separate sections in the camp.^[8] In the Polish section, a lively social and cultural life developed.^[9] The Poles had established a Camp Committee on the day after liberation — initially its meetings were also attended by Polish Jews.^{[4]:314} A school opened in the summer of 1945, attended by up to 600 children, and two kindergartens cared for 100 children. Many Polish DPs were young adults and they started new families in the camp — there were almost 400 weddings and 200 births in the Polish camp.^{[4]:316–317} The Committee published newspapers. A choir, a brass band, an "International Cabaret" and a sports club ("Polonia") were established.^{[4]:316–317} On November 2, 1945 the Polish DPs had a service in which a wooden cross on the former concentration camp site was dedicated as a memorial.^{[4]:313}

The Polish camp was disbanded in September 1946.^[8] The remaining 4,500 Polish DPs were transferred to other camps in the British zone, as many still hesitated to return to (now communist) Poland or to Soviet-occupied eastern Poland.^{[2]:34}^[9] Eventually, around two thirds of Polish DPs in the British zone returned to Poland, others went to the US and Canada.^{[4]:318}

The Jewish camp

With the closure of the Polish section, Belsen became the only exclusively Jewish facility in the British sector, something for which the Jewish survivors had struggled with the British.^[1] The camp was for a while the largest Jewish DP camp in Germany.^{[1][2]:34} Although some had left, in late 1945 thousands of Jews who had survived the Holocaust in Poland or Hungary emigrated westward and many of them came to Belsen, although the British initially refused to give them DP status.^{[2]:30} In August 1946, the DP camp still housed more than 11,000 Jews.^{[4]:325} From then on, the British Army tried to prevent any more Jews from joining the DP camp.^[1]

A first Jewish camp committee was formed on 18 April 1945.^[1] Democratic elections were held in September 1945.^[10] The leader of the Jewish survivors, Josef Rosensaft became president of the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in the British Zone which represented not just the Belsen DPs but all Jewish DPs in the British zone.^{[4]:336–337} In September 1945 and July 1947 the first and second Congress of Liberated Jews in the British Zone took place in the former Wehrmacht officers' mess at Belsen — in the building later known as *The Roundhouse*.^[11]

Under the stewardship of Rosensaft and Norbert Wollheim and Rafael Olewski, the Central Committee grew into an organization that lobbied the British on behalf of the DPs' political, social, and cultural aims, including the right to emigrate to British-controlled Palestine.^{[1][4]:348} Many survivors supported a self-determined Jewish presence in Palestine, even though they had not been Zionists before the war.^[10]

Having lost their families, houses and possessions, they saw no future for themselves in Europe.^[10] DPs demonstrated against the British policy and sent protest notes. International contacts were established, e.g. to the [Zionist Congress](#) at [Basel](#) or the [United Jewish Appeal](#) to gain support abroad.^{[4]:358–359} In October 1945, [David Ben Gurion](#), president of the [Jewish Agency for Palestine](#), visited the DP camp.

The refugees maintained active opposition to British restrictions on Jewish immigration to the [British Mandate of Palestine](#), and until early 1949 (i.e. well after the establishment of the [State of Israel](#) in May 1948), British authorities did not allow free passage in or out of the camp.^[1] Nevertheless, the [Haganah](#) managed to send in agents who held secret military training programmes on the camp grounds in December 1947.^[1]

Both sections of the camp, Polish and Jewish, were largely self-administrating. External security was provided by the British Army. In March 1946, the British transferred administration of the camp to the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency ([UNRRA](#))^[1] but remained responsible for security.

The British (and later the UNRRA), supported by other organisations like the [American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee](#) (JDC) or Jewish Relief Unit (JRU), supplied food, clothing and medicines.^{[4]:340} But the camp inhabitants otherwise ran their own affairs.^{[2]:32} The Jewish Committee established its own court and police force, whose tasks included maintaining public order and to fight black market activities.^{[4]:336–337}

For their part, like the Poles, the Jewish refugees organised a vibrant community within the camp.^[1] Schools were established within months of the liberation.^[1] The DPs founded an elementary school as early as July 1945, and by 1948, 340 pupils attended the school.^[1] A high school, which was staffed partly by soldiers from the [Jewish Brigade](#) (the Palestinian Jewish unit of the British Army) was established in December 1945.^[1] There was a kindergarten, an orphanage, and a [yeshiva](#) (a religious school).^[1] The [Organization for Rehabilitation through Training](#) (ORT) vocational training schools organized occupational education.^[1] By mid-1947 ORT had instructed around 1,500 people in training courses that mostly lasted six months.^{[4]:354–355} In 1947, a kibbutz had 2,760 members.^{[4]:328} Also like the Poles, many of the Jewish survivors were young adults and in the first two years after liberation there were almost 1,000 Jewish weddings. By the time the camp was dissolved, over 1,000 children had been born in it.^{[4]:328}

A Yiddish theatre called *Kazet* had been founded in July 1945 by Sami Feder. It staged plays on the fate of the Jews in ghettos and concentration camps, written by himself, as well as older Yiddish plays from Eastern Europe.^{[4]:350–351} *Kazet* was in operation until the summer of 1947. In 1946, Abraham Sandman founded the Socialist-Zionist *Jiddische Arbeiterbühne*.^{[4]:350–351}

A Zionist newspaper known as [Unzer Sztyme](#) (Yiddish for "Our Voice") was published by the DPs of Belsen and became the main Jewish newspaper in the British sector.^[1] It was edited by Paul Trepman, David Rosenthal, and [Rafael Olewski](#) and had been published initially by the Jewish Committee in Celle and then by the Culture & History Committee of the [Central](#)

Committee of Liberated Jews in the British Zone (headed by Olewski, Trepman, & Rosenthal).^{[4]:346–348}

Dissolution of the DP camp

Large numbers of DPs began leaving the camp in 1947 as opportunities for emigration improved.^[10] Beginning in the spring of 1947, the British government allocated 300 certificates a month to Jews in the British occupation zone — these allowed legal emigration to Palestine.^{[2]:35} Between April 1947 and the founding of the State of Israel in May 1948 around 4,200 Jews from the British zone, most of them from Belsen, emigrated there legally.^{[4]:361} By March 1949, the population was down to 4,500.^{[4]:325} The DP camp at Belsen was closed in September 1950^[8] and the remaining 1,000 people transferred to Upjever near Wilhelmshaven.^{[2]:35} This camp in turn was closed in August 1951.^{[4]:364} The majority of former Belsen DPs emigrated to the State of Israel.^[1] Many others went to the US (over 2,000) or Canada (close to 800), a minority decided to stay in Germany and helped to rebuild the Jewish communities there.^{[2]:35}

Displaced persons camp

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia



Map of Föhrenwald DP camp in Bavaria



Class portrait of school children at [Schauenstein](#) DP camp, about 1946

A **displaced persons camp** or **DP camp** is a temporary facility for [displaced persons](#). The term is mainly used for camps established after [World War II](#) in [Germany](#), [Austria](#), and [Italy](#), primarily for refugees from [Eastern Europe](#) and for the former inmates of the [Nazi German concentration camps](#). Two years after the [end of World War II in Europe](#), some 850,000 people lived in DP camps across Europe, among them [Armenians](#), [Poles](#), [Latvians](#), [Lithuanians](#), [Estonians](#), [Yugoslavs](#), [Jews](#), [Greeks](#), [Russians](#), [Ukrainians](#) and [Czechoslovaks](#).^[1]

In recent times, camps have existed in many parts of the world for groups of displaced people including for [refugees](#) in the [Darfur](#) region of Sudan, and for [Palestinians](#) in Lebanon and Jordan, as well as for [Afghan refugees](#) in Pakistan. Such camps are now generally known as [refugee camps](#).

DP camps following World War II

Background

Combat operations, [ethnic cleansing](#), and the fear of [genocide](#) resulted in millions of people being uprooted from their homes in the course of World War II. Between 11 million and 20 million people were displaced. The majority were inmates of [Nazi concentration camps](#), [Labor camps](#) and [prisoner-of-war camps](#) that were freed by the [Allied](#) armies.^[2] In portions of Eastern Europe, both civilians and military personnel fled their home countries in fear of advancing Soviet armies, who were preceded by widespread reports of [mass rape](#), pillaging, looting, and murder.^[3]

As the war ended, these people found themselves facing an uncertain future. Allied military and civilian authorities faced considerable challenges resettling them. Since the reasons for displacement varied considerably, the [Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force](#) classified individuals into a number of categories: evacuees, war or political refugees, political prisoners, forced or voluntary workers, [Organisation Todt](#) workers, former forces under German command, deportees, intruded persons, extruded persons, civilian internees, ex-[prisoners of war](#), and stateless persons.

In addition, displaced persons came from every country that had been invaded and/or occupied by German forces. Although the situation of many of the DPs could be resolved by simply moving them to their original homes, this could not be done, for example, where borders changed to place the location in a new country. Additionally, many could not return home for fear of political persecution or retribution for perceived (or actual) collaboration with Axis powers.

Establishing a system for resolving displacement

The original plan for those displaced as a result of World War II was to repatriate them to their countries of origin as quickly as possible. Depending on [sectors occupied](#) in [Austria](#) and [Germany](#), American, French, British, or [Soviet](#) forces tended to the immediate needs of the refugees and set in motion plans for repatriation. (Estimates for displaced persons do not typically include several million ethnic Germans in Europe (Poland, the Netherlands etc.) who were expelled and repatriated in Germany. See [Flight and expulsion of Germans \(1944–1950\)](#).)

In the months and sometimes years following the end of the war, displaced persons typically reported to military personnel who attended to their immediate needs. Nearly all of them were malnourished, a great number were ill, and some were dying. Shelter was often improvised, and there were many instances of military personnel sharing from their own supplies of food, medicine, clothing, etc., to help the refugees. In a matter of weeks, there was a more or less formalized infrastructure for taking in, registering, treating, classifying, sorting, and transporting displaced persons.

Initially, military missions of the various Allied nations attached to the British, French and U.S. army commands assisted in the sorting and classifying the DPs of their own nationality. For example, during 1945 and 1946 there were several dozen Polish liaison officers attached to individual occupation army units.^[4] On October 1, 1945, the [United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration](#) (UNRRA), which had already been running many of the camps, took responsibility for the administration of displaced persons in Europe,^[5] though military authorities continued to play a role for several years to come, in providing transportation, supplies and security.

Those who were easily classified and were willing to be repatriated were rapidly sent back to their country of origin. By the end of 1945, over six million refugees were repatriated by the military forces and UNRRA. British authorities made June 30, 1946 the cutoff for accepting further displaced persons in their sector of occupation, and the American sector set it at August 1, with the exception of those persecuted for race or religion, or who entered the zone in "an organized manner." The American sector ceased receiving new arrivals on April 21, 1947. An unknown number of displaced persons rejected by authorities were left to find their own means of survival.

Camps

Displaced persons began to appear in substantial numbers in the spring of 1945. Allied forces took them into their care by improvising shelter wherever it could be found. Accommodations primarily included former military barracks, but also included summer camps for children, airports, hotels, castles, hospitals, private homes, and even partly destroyed structures. Although there were continuous efforts to sort and consolidate populations, there were hundreds of DP facilities in Germany, Austria, Italy, and other European countries by the end of 1945. One camp was even set up in [Guanajuato](#) in Mexico.

The UNRRA moved quickly to field teams to take over administration of the camps from the military forces.

A number of DP camps became more or less permanent homes for these individuals. Conditions were varied and sometimes harsh. Rations were restricted, and curfews were frequently imposed. Camps were shut down as refugees found new homes and there was continuous consolidation of remaining refugees into fewer camps.

By 1952, all but two DP camps were closed. The last two DP camps, [Föhrenwald](#) closed in 1957 and [Wels](#) in 1959.

The needs of displaced persons

All displaced persons had experienced trauma, and many had serious health conditions as a result of what they had endured.

The immediate concern was to provide shelter, nutrition and basic health care. Most DPs had subsisted on diets of far less than 1,500 [calories](#) a day. Sanitary conditions had been improvised at best, and there had been minimal medical care. As a result, they suffered from malnutrition, a variety of diseases, and were often unclean, lice-ridden, and prone to illness.

In addition, most of the refugees suffered from psychological difficulties. They were often distrustful and apprehensive around authorities, and many were depressed and traumatized.

Displaced persons were anxious to be reunited with families they had been separated from in the course of the war. Improvised efforts to identify survivors became formalized through the UNRRA's Central Tracking Bureau and facilities of the [International Red Cross](#). The organization collected over one million names in the course of the DP era and eventually became the [International Tracing Service](#).

Displaced persons often moved from camp to camp, looking for family, countrymen, or better food and accommodations. Over time, ethnic and religious groups concentrated in certain camps.

Camp residents quickly set up churches, synagogues, newspapers, sports events, schools, and even universities. Among these were the Technical University in [Esslingen](#) set up by the [Polish Mission](#), the [Free Ukrainian University](#), the [Ukrainian Technical-Agricultural Institute of Prodebrady](#), the [Baltic University](#) and the short-lived [UNRRA University](#). German universities were required to accept a quota of DP students.

A number of charitable organizations provided significant humanitarian relief and services among displaced persons - these include the [American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee](#), [American Friends Service Committee](#), [British Friends Relief Service](#), the [Lutheran World Federation](#), [Catholic Charities](#), several national [Red Cross](#) organizations, [Polish American Congress](#) and [Ukrainian American Relief Committee](#).

The difficulties of repatriation

Over one million refugees could not be repatriated to their original countries and were left homeless as a result of fear of persecution. These included:

- Ethnic or religious groups that were likely to be persecuted in their countries of origin. These included a large number of Jews (see [Sh'erit ha-Pletah](#)), and others.
- Poles, Ukrainians and some Czechs - who feared persecution by the communist regimes installed in their home countries by the [Soviet Army](#), in particular those from provinces ([Galicia](#), etc.) that had been recently incorporated into the [Soviet Union](#).
- [Estonians](#), [Lithuanians](#) and [Latvians](#), whose homelands had been invaded in 1940 by the Soviet Union, and remained occupied after the war.
- [Croats](#), [Serbs](#) and [Slovenes](#) who feared persecution by the communist government set up by [Josip Broz Tito](#).
- In a portent of the [Cold War](#), individuals who simply wanted to avoid living under a communist regime.

The agreement reached at the [Yalta Conference](#) required in principle that all citizens of the allied powers be repatriated to their home country. The Soviet Union insisted that refugees in the American, British, and French sectors who were or at some point had been Soviet citizens be sent back to the Soviet Union. A large number of refugees resisted this, fearing that their fleeing Soviet rule had condemned them as traitors.

American, British, and French military officials, as well as UNRRA officials, reluctantly complied with this directive, and a number of Soviet citizens were repatriated. Many of these met with the hardship they feared, including death and confinement in the [Gulags](#). There were also cases of kidnapping and coercion to return these refugees. Many avoided such repatriation by misrepresenting their origins, fleeing, or simply resisting. Rejecting claimed Soviet sovereignty over the Baltic states, allied officials also refused to repatriate Lithuanian, Estonian, and Latvian refugees against their will.

Similarly, a large number of refugees who were repatriated to Yugoslavia were subjected to summary executions and torture.

A large number of Poles, who later agreed to be repatriated, did in fact suffer arrest and some were executed, particularly those that had served in the [Warsaw Uprising](#) of 1944, or in the [Polish Resistance](#) against the Nazis.

Jewish survivors of the death camps and various work camps similarly refused to return to their countries of origin, starting instead an extensive underground movement to migrate to the [British Mandate of Palestine](#). - see [Berihah](#).

Resettlement of DPs

Once it became obvious that repatriation plans left a large number of DPs who needed new homes, it took time for countries to commit to accepting refugees. Existing refugee quotas were completely inadequate, and by the fall of 1946, it was not clear whether the remaining DPs would ever find a home.

Between 1947 and 1953, the vast majority of the "non-repatriables" would find new homes around the world, particularly among these countries:^[6]

- Belgium was the first country to adopt a large-scale immigration program when it called for 20,000 coal mine workers from the DP ranks, bringing in a total of 22,000 DPs near the end of 1947. The program met with some controversy, as critics viewed it as a cynical ploy to get cheap labor.
- The United Kingdom accepted 86,000 DPs as part of various labor import programs, the largest being "Operation Westward Ho". These came in addition to 115,000 Polish army veterans who had joined the [Polish Resettlement Corps](#) and 12,000 former members of the Waffen SS Ukrainian [Halychyna Division](#).
- Canada first accepted a number of refugees through [Orders in Council](#) and then implemented a bulk-labor program to accept qualified labor and a close-relatives plan, that ultimately took the form of a sponsorship plan. By the end of 1951, Canada had accepted 157,687 refugees.
- **Australia had initially launched an immigration program targeting refugees of British stock, but expanded this in late 1947 to include other refugees. Australia accepted a total of 182,159 refugees, principally of Polish and Baltic origins.**
- By the time [Israel](#) was established in 1948, as many as 50,000 refugees had entered the country legally or illegally. Completely opening its doors to all Jewish refugees regardless of age, work ability, health, etc., Israel accepted more than 652,000 refugees by 1950.
- France accepted 38,157 displaced persons.
- In Latin America, [Venezuela](#) accepted 17,000 DPs; [Brazil](#) 29,000; and [Argentina](#) 33,000.
- [French Morocco](#) accepted 1,500 immigrants; [Iraq](#) extended an invitation to ten unmarried medical doctors.

- Norway accepted about 492 Jewish refugees, largely based on their ability to perform manual labor. These were scattered throughout the country, and most left as soon as they could, primarily to Israel.

- The United States was late to accept displaced persons, which led to considerable activism for a change in policy. [Earl G. Harrison](#), who had previously reported on conditions in the camps to President Truman, led the [Citizens Committee on Displaced Persons](#) that attracted dignitaries such as [Eleanor Roosevelt](#), [David Dubinsky](#), [Marshall Field](#), [A. Philip Randolph](#), and others. Meeting considerable opposition in the United States Congress with a bias against Central and Eastern European intellectuals and Jews, Truman signed the first DP act on June 25, 1948, allowing entry by 200,000 DPs; and then followed by the more accommodating second DP act on June 16, 1950, allowing entry for another 200,000.
- This quota included acceptance of 55,000 [Volksdeutschen](#) and required sponsorship of all immigrants. The American program was the most idealistic and expansive of the Allied programs but also the most notoriously bureaucratic. Much of the humanitarian effort was undertaken by charitable organizations, such as the Lutheran World Federation and ethnic groups. Of the 400,000 DP's the US admitted from eastern Europe in between 1941 and 1957, 137,450 were [European Jews](#).^[7]

By 1953, over 250,000 refugees were still in Europe, most of them old, infirm, crippled, or otherwise disabled. Some found resolution through suicide. Some European countries accepted these refugees on a humanitarian basis. Norway accepted 200 refugees who were blind or had tuberculosis, and Sweden also accepted a limited number. In the end most of them were accepted by Germany and Austria for their care and ultimately full resettlement as citizens.

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Wikimedia Commons has media related to [***Displaced persons camps***](#).

1. [Jump up](#) ^ [DP Camps in Europe Intro](#), from: *DPs Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-1951* by Mark Wyman
2. [Jump up](#) ^ ISBN 0-8014-8542-8 "Dps: Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-1951" by Mark Wyman ; reprinted 1998 Cornell University Press
3. [Jump up](#) ^ [Antony Beevor](#), *Berlin: The Downfall 1945*, Penguin Books, 2002, ISBN 0-670-88695-5
4. [Jump up](#) ^ ISBN 1-57087-204-X "Thirteen is My Lucky Number" Chapters 7 and 8
5. [Jump up](#) ^ *ibid* - p.47 and subsequent
6. [Jump up](#) ^ "[Michigan Family History Network report](#)". Dpcamps.org. Retrieved 2012-05-14.
7. [Jump up](#) ^ "[United States Policy Toward Jewish Refugees, 1941-1952](#)". Ushmm.org. Retrieved 2012-05-14.

An Excel Worksheet that records all of the DP Camps in Germany, Austria and Italy is now included in the database titled "Narrogin Post War Immigrant Families (V16)".

Further reading

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- [Irene Eber](#) "The Choice – Poland, 1939–1945." [ISBN 0-8052-4197-3](#), 2004. Pub. Schocken Books Inc., NY. 240 p.

External links

- [DP Camps](#)
- [Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota](#)
- [Links to national archives regarding DP Camps](#)
- [Jewish Virtual Library topic page](#)
- [ORT and the DP Camps](#)
- United States Holocaust Museum - [The Aftermath](#) and exhibition [Life Reborn: Jewish Displaced Persons Project](#)
- [Yad Vashem lexical entry on displaced persons](#)
- [Simon Wiesenthal Center on the Aftermath](#)
- [German language article in shoa.de on displaced persons in Germany](#)
- [Lightning and Ashes, blog about Polish DPs](#)

- [DP Camp - Rehabilitation for Emigration. Area Vocational Training School. Ingolstadt, Bavaria, Germany 1948](#)
- [Guide to the Records of the Displaced Persons Camps and Centers in Germany](#) (RG 294.2), at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York, NY
- [Guide to the Records of the Displaced Persons Camps and Centers in Italy](#) (RG 294.3), at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York, NY
- [Guide to the Records of the Displaced Persons Camps and Centers in Austria](#) (RG 294.4), at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York, NY
- [Guide to the Displaced Persons Camps and Centers Photograph Collection](#) (RG 294.5), at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York, NY
- [Guide to the Displaced Persons Camps and Centers Poster Collection](#) (RG 294.6), at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York, NY

Life in the Narrogin Railway Tent Camp

The following information is based mostly on the recollections of Mrs Lena (Helen) Sedlarczuk who shared them with her son Bob who passed them on to me.

The First Railway Tent Camp consisted of 2 lines of canvas tents located either side of a very basic gravel track. The Families were provided with only the barest of facilities. Initially there was no running water, electricity or ablution facilities. Toilet facilities consisted of a basic pan system that was collected once per week as there were no septic toilets. Some time after the first group of Immigrants settled into the camp, a communal shower block with septic toilets and a basic laundry was constructed. The accepted rule was that ladies went first in the showers while the men and boys waited their turn.

Initially, water had to be carried from a large water tank near the loco sheds that provided water for the many steam locomotives that provided all of the locomotive hauling capacity that existed at the time. The tank was approximately 300 metres from the centre of the camp.

Cooking was done in the open, on fires contained within a half 44 gallon drum. Remnants of some of these old fire drums can still be found at the old campsite. In some cases these were replaced by a pot bellied stove, while some of the more fortunate Families had a Metters Number 1 wood stove set up between their two tents. Perishable food was stored in a hole dug in the ground and lined with boards. These holes were used in some cases to store scarce valuables hidden behind one of the boards.

Each of the Families was provided with 2 tents, one for the parents and one for their children, 2 kerosene lights, wire beds, straw mattresses, kapok pillows and a blanket and sheet for each person. The tents had dirt floors, however when the railway sleepers were replaced near the camp, the men were allowed to take the old sleepers to build floors in some of the tents. They did not have the luxury of covering the sleepers with lino or carpet.

Furniture was apple boxes or the like to sit on. Some people, like Bob Sedlarczuk's godmother Mrs Maria Bereza were lucky enough to save their large wooden trunk that contained her personal belongings from Europe which was used for their table. Other Immigrants relied on broken or old pieces of furniture from rubbish tips.

As time went by, the Families improved their living conditions by their own initiative. As some Families moved from the camp into houses in town or the town caravan park, the remaining Families stripped their shacks to build on or improve their own.

Those families that moved into the town caravan park paid 1 shilling (10 cents) per week and had access to electric lighting, separate ladies and men's showers and toilets, and were closer to town.

The first group of Immigrants moved into the first Railway Tent Camp in December 1950. Emil Zabajnik recalls that his Family and others were transferred from Northam to Narrogin on the back of a truck. A number of Families arrived over a short period of time from early December 1950. This extended group soon included the Bak, Bakowicz, Bereza, Bielecki, Chmielewski, Galus, Gavronski, Gornik, Hruby, Jendrzajczak, Kaczmarczyk, Kozeniauskis, Lisowski, Petkovic, Rosiejak, Salata, Samulkiewicz, Sedlarczuk, Sorokiewicz, Titko, Wnuk and Zekowski Families.

After 6 to 12 months a second Railway Tent Camp was established in Fairway Street to take even more Families. The European Immigrant database contains a column headed "Camps" that has been used to record which Families lived in the two camps. It is possible that some Families may have unfortunately been overlooked due to a lack of information and records.

Based on information provided by Mrs Sedlarczuk and others, the following Families are those who are believed to have spent some time in one of the two Railway tent camps before they moved into the Town Caravan park or houses in town;

Alexandrow	Hruby	Salata	Valenta
Bak	Hrynczuk	Samulkiewicz	Virtovic
Bakowicz	Jendrzajczak	Sanozkyi	Weirenko
Bedov	Jewstreski	Sedlarczuk	Wisniewski
Belczowski	Kaczmarczyk	Schukowsky	Wnuk
Bielicki	Kosicki	Siedlovskas	Wrona
Bereza	Kozeniauskis	Smal	Zabajnik
Blaszkwow	Kozlov	Smigiel	Zajda
Bondarenko	Lisowski	Sorokiewicz	Zajac
Boskovs	Losik	Stec	Zapara
Buemi	Makedonez	Stirmlinger	Zazulski
Chmielewski	Miskiewicz	Sylwestruk	Zekowski
Fomenko (x2)	Nardini	Szafranski	Zieba
Galus	Partyka	Szewczenko	Zielke
Gavrilovic	Petkovic	Szewczyk	
Gavronski	Potapenya	Tiosek	
Gornik	Rosiejak	Titko	

These names have been extracted from the "Camp" column of the Immigrant database.

Mrs Helen Sedlarczuk told her son Bob about "a good guy named Jack McGay" who used to let the Immigrant women come behind the counter at his grocer shop to select the vegetables they wanted. Jack's son Doug was in my class at school and he has kindly contributed a story to "Recollections of Individual Family Members" at Appendix 4.

Mrs Sedlarczuk does not recall any of the Families in the camp having a motor car, however she does recall that a number of people owned bicycles.

The children in the camp walked to school. Most went to Saint Joseph's Convent School as most of the Families in the Camp were of the Catholic faith, while some attended the mainly Protestant State School. Photos taken of the 1953 Infants Classes at the State Primary School included Stan Samulkiewicz and Peter Sedlarczuk who were living in the Railway Tent Camp at the time.

Other students who did not live in the Railway Tent Camp included Rene Borsboon, Margot Busik, Nik Fomenko, Lodga Kaminski, Henry Kaminski, Hans Kapp, Stephen Matveev, Marie Sanoske, Monica Sitarz and Halina Staporek. It would be reasonable to assume that a number of children, in the Railway Camp and the Main Roads Camp nearby, would have been in the same class at school.

Some of the Mothers in the camp were employed as domestic staff at the Narrogin Hospital as well as the three hotels in town. While they still had a very important job of caring for and raising their young families, their work helped to supplement the basic wages received by their husbands working for WAGR. Mrs Helen Sedlarczuk worked in the laundry at the Narrogin District Hospital for 36 years until she was forced to retire through ill health in 1992. Other long term employees of the Hospital included Mrs Nina Barankewitsch, Helena Boron, Maria Cebula, Helen Chmielewski, Zophia Galus, Maria Gornik, Stepha Januskiewicz, Sophia Jendrzeczak, Sophia Lisowski, Helena Miskiewicz, Stefania Nowak, Marie Parafianowicz, Katrina Pochroj, Maria Potapenya, Maria Samulkiewicz (34 years), Rosa Titko, Wladislawa Virtovic, Maria Zalopa and Maria Zapara.

At the time the new Immigrants came to Narrogin there was no swimming pool in town. Many of the children learned to swim in the Railway Dam. When a swimming pool was eventually built, some of them went on to become champion swimmers like Peter Sedlarczuk who set a State Butterfly record in the 1960s that stood until the 1980s.

The Railway Dam also contributed to the early development of excellent water polo players like the Zabajnik brothers. Swimming at the Railway Dam also provided an opportunity for the children living in the Railway Camp to mix with the children living in the Main Roads Camp.

Clyde Evans recalls that many of the immigrants living in the camps spent a lot of time fishing for red perch in the Railway Dam with a high degree of success. The Railway Dam was also a popular destination for a number of Australian kids and brought them into contact with the "New" Australian kids. Those Australian kids who spent time at the Railway Dam were quite accepting of the children of the immigrants and a number of friendships developed.

When the Immigrants arrived in town in the early nineteen fifties, Narrogin was a very important hub of the State's rail network. The main railway line from Perth to Albany ran through Narrogin and still does. A third line ran east through Yilliminning and the central wheatbelt to Merredin. Two lines that no longer exist were the Collie line which crossed Great Southern Highway near the old Butter Factory and the Pinjarra line.

The Pinjarra line ran near what is now the Narrogin Saleyards, crossing the Narrogin – Wandering Road about 3.5 kms from Clayton Road, and passing through Congelin and Dwarda. It crossed Albany Highway just south of the Hotham River Bridge and north of the Boddington turnoff.

Most of the rail network was constructed in the eighteen nineties and by the end of the Second World War it was in urgent need of rehabilitation. It was the primary freight network in the Region and contributed significantly to the prosperity of the region.

The construction of a monument at the Railway Dam, designed by Bob Sedlarczuk and constructed by him with the help of local volunteers, to acknowledge the significant contribution of many of the Railway Immigrant workers to the upgrading and maintenance of the Region's rail network provides a very fitting tribute to many men and their Families who worked so hard to become valued and respected citizens of Narrogin.

Executive Summary

Narrogin's Post World War II European Immigrants

An Essay by Gary Norwell

The ten years after the end of World War 2 was one of the most significant periods in the history and development of Narrogin. Many of the Australian men who had fought overseas had just returned home to start what is now known as the "Baby Boom". In the late nineteen forties and early nineteen fifties, hundreds of European Immigrants came to Narrogin mainly from Displaced Persons camps in Germany and Italy. Their countries of origin included Poland, Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Italy, Belarus, Russia and Germany.

Two former Narrogin residents, Gary Norwell and Bob Sedlarczuk, have developed a database containing the names of 300 Immigrant Families and Single men who came to Narrogin after World War II.

Information has been obtained through the following means;

- Mrs Lena (Helen) Sedlarczuk who still lives in Narrogin
- Papers written by Narrogin's Honorary Historian Mr Maurice White
- Cemetery records
- Photographs of grave headstones taken by Bob Sedlarczuk
- Lost Narrogin Facebook site through Bob Sedlarczuk

The complete essay contains the following Appendices;

- Appendix 1 – Maurie White's "Tribute to "The New Australians""
- Appendix 2 – Government of WA Press Release – Heritage Listing of former Main Roads Migrant Camp in Narrogin.
- Appendix 3 – Email from Gary Norwell to Heritage Minister in support of Heritage Listing
- Appendix 4 – Recollections of 5 Individual Immigrant Family members and 3 second and third generation Australians.
- Appendix 5 – The Displaced Persons Camps in Germany, Austria and Italy extracted from Wikipedia.
- Appendix 6 – Life in the Narrogin Railway Tent Camp.

Arrangements have been made with the Manager of Library Services, Kay Weaver, for the database of European Immigrant Families and the essay to be available from the Narrogin Town Library website at www.narrogin.wa.gov.au under "Library Services".

Hard copy documents will also be available to read in the Library.

Any additional information or corrections to the Essay can be sent to gary.norwell@inet.net.au .

Any additional information or corrections to the database can be sent to scossacks@bigpond.com .

Text of bronze plaque in Memorial Park and two Information Panels for WAGR and MRD

Narrogin's Post War European Immigrants

Following the end of World War II, around 280 Families and Single men migrated to Narrogin mainly from Displaced Persons Camps in Europe.

People came from Poland, Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Belarus, Italy, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, The Netherlands, Germany and Russia.

For many of the Families, their first home in Narrogin was in one of the camps that were established to accommodate them.

The Families of men who worked for WAGR lived in tents on railway land; Main Roads Families lived in Nissen huts, tents and tin shacks within the Main Roads depot.

Single men lived in boarding houses and the Town Caravan Park.

Further information is available through the Narrogin Town Library

Information Panel at Main Roads Depot - Main Roads' European Immigrant Employees

This site was the first home for more than 20 European Migrant Families who came to Narrogin between 1949 and 1955 as Displaced Persons after the Second World War. They lived in 6 Nissen huts, tents and tin shacks. Families came from Poland, Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Italy, Russia and Germany. The men worked for Main Roads and contributed significantly to the development of the road network in the Region. In January 2015 this was declared a Heritage site by the State Government

The following Immigrants worked for Main Roads for 20 to 40 years.

M. Barankewitsch, J. Bialedda, M. Bloch, A. Buemi, G. Bulich, F. Druck, J. Fic, F. Galea, J. Jablonski, K. Kosmider, V. Lanciano, W. Mrowczynski, P. Olywa, Z. Ostrowski, O. Saare B. Schukowsky, J. Staporek W. Sylwestruk K. Tonts

Photos – Nissen Hut and Zana Parafianowicz on a bike.

Information Panel at Railway Dam - WA Government Railways' European Immigrant Employees

The site of the tent camp that was home to many European Immigrant families who worked for WAGR is a short walk from this location. Families came from Poland, Ukraine, Latvia, Czechoslovakia, Italy, Russia and Germany.

Men who worked for the WAGR contributed significantly to the upgrading and maintenance of the rail network in the Great Southern Region. The following Families were some of the first residents of the tent camp from December 1950. Bakowicz, Bielecki, Bereza, Chmielewski, Jendrzyczak, Kaczmarczyk, Kozeniauskas, Salata, Samulkiewicz, Sedlarczuk, Titko, Wnuk and Zabajnik,

The following men worked for WAGR/Westrail for 20 to 40 years; A. Alexandrow, E. Boni, B. Chmielewski, G. Cipriani, T. Conadolli, M. Galus, W. Gornik, L. Hovich W. Hrynczuk, S. Jendrzyczak, T. Jewstreski. G. Juba, B. Kaczmarczyk, H. Kotara, M. Kozicki, S. Lisowski S. Makedonez, A. Madej, J. Miskiewicz, A. Nardini, M. Parafianowicz, A. Pinto, J. Potapenya, W. Rosiejak, W. Rozmaniec, J. Samulkiewicz, J. Smal, A. Smigiel, W. Szafranski, I. Valenta, L. Virtovic J. Wnuk, W. Wrona, S. Zajda, M. Zapara, J. Zielke

Photos – Tent camp and Rail Motor Gang